

TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR



MAGAZINE
INDIA

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July 2015



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LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA
TRAVEL AWARDS

2015



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Lonely Planet Magazine India provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

- by publishing information on all appropriate travel suppliers and not just those who provided us with assistance
- by never promising to offer anything in return, such as positive coverage.

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This Month's Cover



Well, yes, you'd have to be daft to try to use this at Immigration, but use it when you plan and you'll find plenty of great travel options – and all are reader-voted, so you only have yourselves to blame.



Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor
Follow me on Twitter: @vardhan_lpmag

LPMI TRAVEL AWARDS 2015

CLICK TO FOLLOW VARDHAN



The Golden Age of Travel.

To be honest, I've always felt I was born in the wrong age: my thumbs, for one, aren't large enough for smart-phone screens. How frightening is it to live at a time when everyone knows you have to make a face like an ecstatic duck when faced with a camera? I know what a subject and a predicate are in a sentence, but I don't know what plants grow around my building's parking lot, and, more importantly, I don't live in an age where I can use my lordly privileges to lop the heads off people who drive badly, and that depresses me no end. I'm guessing everyone has a 'time' they'd feel most comfortable in; perhaps it's right now, perhaps it's 17th-century Japan, or a future where everyone grows glow-in-the-dark weed in their gardens. Mine is some sort of non-specific golden age, where everyone is rich and drives around in 1960s Italian sports cars to 1920s parties to meet Bertie Wooster in gorgeous Art Deco buildings. This is an age where travelling is an occasion, not a chore, where places are still undiscovered, where travelling through grand landscapes is part of the holiday, not something you skip to get to your next planned 'activity.' This is an age where everyone's stylish, where ladies wear big hats and people dress to go on flights and where airport security people have been taken away and boiled.

Hey, I never said it had to make sense.

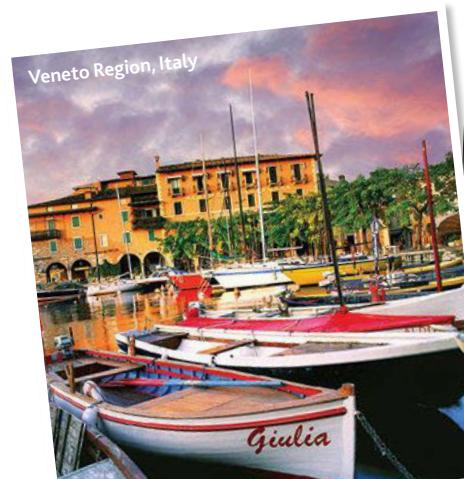
In a strange way, that's what we're trying to do with our awards – reward the destinations and hotels that make your travel special again. Places you feel privileged to be in, hotels that treat your visit like it's the one thing they've always wanted – the things that lift travel above the ordinary. And let me tell you: it isn't easy. At a time when opinions are made or forgotten in seconds over social media, years of work to achieve consistently high quality is pretty remarkable.

And, dear winners, if you wish to get in touch with me, I'll be in the 1920s, with Jay Gatsby. Trying very hard not to make selfie duck-faces.



WHAT ELSE IS IN THIS ISSUE

1. Florida! The main hunting-ground of retirees in horrible shirts, but also a beautiful place with great architecture, island scenery and lots to do.
2. Papua New Guinea, which has utterly gorgeous waters, super-cool people and pigeons that apparently look like Queen Victoria.
3. Italy's Veneto region: great towns and villages easily accessible from Venice, and a good change from tourist hot-spots.



Contents

Volume 6, Issue 6 | July 2015



The LPMI Travel Awards 2015, pg 58

Regulars

POSTCARDS

YOUR TRAVEL PHOTOS AND THE STORIES BEHIND THEM

10 Walking through a colourful *souq* in **Marrakesh, Morocco**, and other great travel images from our readers

GLOBETROTTER

THIS MONTH'S TRAVEL NEWS, VIEWS AND DISCOVERIES

28 **World on your Plate:** They eat their fish raw in **French Polynesia** – and you can, too, with *poisson cru*
36 **You Ask Us:** Yes, it is safe to **swim with sharks**, and good for them too!

EASY TRIPS

SHORT BREAKS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW

38 Kick-start a new skill with a *kalaripayattu* class in **Kozhikode, Kerala**
42 Indulge in a luxurious staycation at **The Imperial, New Delhi**
46 As the water levels rise with the monsoon, go rafting on the **Zanskar River in Jammu & Kashmir**
50 Stay put at these **great stay options** as the heavens open up over **Goa**
54 Love the crafts of **Jaipur, Rajasthan**? Make a few of your own

MINI GUIDES

THEMED GUIDES TO PULL OUT AND TAKE WITH YOU

124 The food in **Cape Town, South Africa**, is a mix of the regional and the eclectic, thanks to its many exceptional chefs. Don't forget to pair it with the fine wines found here
126 **Hong Kong in the People's Republic of China** makes for a fun-filled stopover – bet at the races, or get your fortune told at the bustling night market





21 fun things to do in Florida, pg 90

Beyond Venice,
pg 108



Postcards,
pg 10



Easy trips,
pg 37



Contents

Volume 6, Issue 6 | July 2015



**Papua New Guinea
in photographs, pg 100**

Features

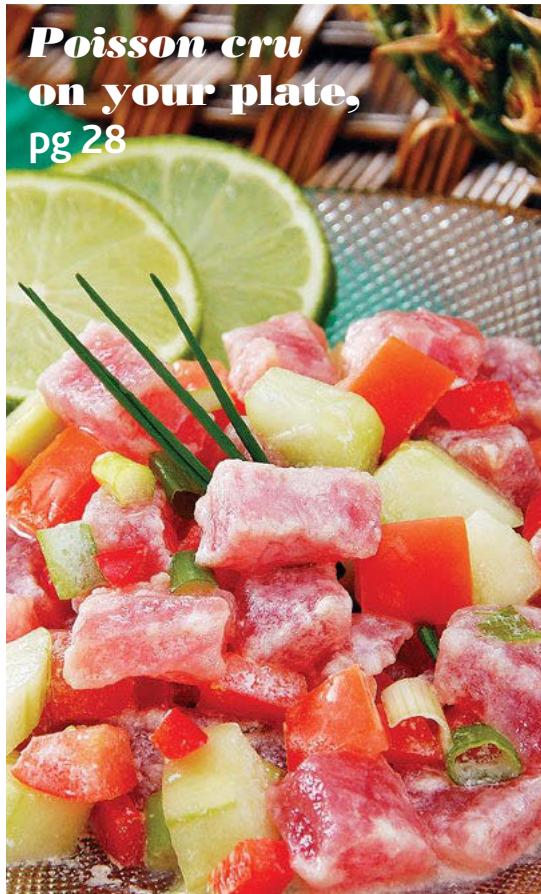
58 It's that time of the year again!
Presenting the winners of the
**Lonely Planet Magazine India
Travel Awards 2015**

90 From manatees to swamp apes,
with some porn (of the safe kind)
thrown in, here's our pick of
21 fun things to do in Florida

100 Explore little-visited **Papua New Guinea**
through photographs, as experienced
by a reader

108 Venture a little beyond Venice and
discover the marvels that hide in
plain sight in the **Veneto** region of Italy

PHOTOGRAPH: SUBIR GHOSH (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)



**Poisson cru
on your plate,
pg 28**

**The Photo Story:
Bhutan, pg 24**



KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

Here's a quick guide to the sections and elements in our magazine, so you can max out your travel experience – and a menu of what's new in LPMI 2.0



Globetrotter

The jam-packed Globetrotter section brings you closer to the world through photo features, cutaways, interviews with travel buffs, food and other tidbits, and also offers sage travel advice in the form of Q&As and news on deals and upcoming festivals. Pg 23

The Photo Story

You can't really get much clearer than that name – a photographic journey that explores an interesting facet of a destination – architecture, wildlife, the great outdoors, food and drink... they all find their space here! Pg 24

Arrivals

From fun events and festivals around which you can plan your trips, to cool offers from across the globe and handy apps to make your trips simpler, if it's happening in the world of travel, you'll find it here. Pg 30



Postcards

This is your section entirely: we invite you, our readers, to send in photographs of special moments on your travels, little events or vistas that struck a chord or made you laugh. Tell us what you were doing there, and how this photograph came to be. Best of all, you don't need to be a professional photographer to be featured here. Pg 10

Easy Trips

'Easy' is the operative word here. These trips are extremely simple to plan and head out on at short notice. Typically weekend trips from the larger cities in India, all our destinations are easily accessible. We also have a 'Go Now' badge: these trips are generally seasonal, and often linked to upcoming festivals or events. Pg 37

Features

These are our longer, more elaborate stories, which get under the skin of a place. Each feature has a Make It Happen section; a practical guide with all the information you need to plan out this trip. This includes, where possible, the ideal, step-by-step itinerary to best enjoy a destination: take it to your agent, and off you go! Pg 57

Mini Guides

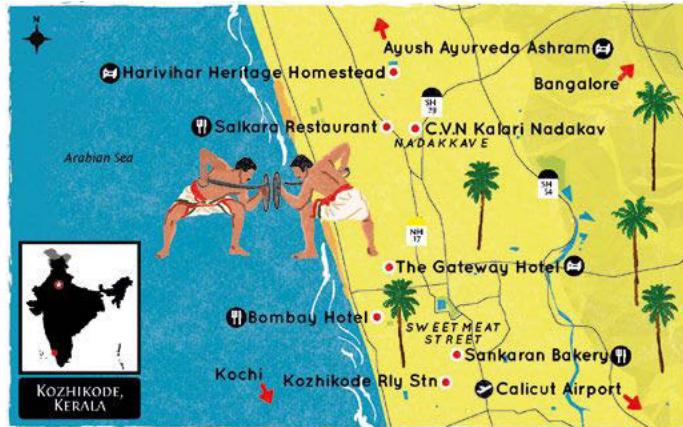
A hugely practical set of guides to cities or regions for you to tear out, fold and keep in your bag. Each Mini Guide contains a detailed map, hotel and restaurant listings, a slice of things to do and see, plus other useful info (Indian embassies abroad, currency, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, etc). Pg 123

KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE



Location:
Offers access to the relevant map

EASY TRIPS LEARN KALARIPAYATTU IN KOZHIKODE, KERALA



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (350km)

Closest city: Kochi (180km)

Closest airport: Calicut International Airport (30km), located in Karipur, is connected to most Indian metros. Air India, Jet Airways and SpiceJet fly to Kozhikode from Bangalore (return fares from ₹3,500).

Closest railhead: Kozhikode Railway Station (4km; CLT). Take the 16527 Yesvantpur-Cannanore Express (leaves Yesvantpur Junction

[YPR] 8pm, arrives CLT 7.25am; ₹ 875 Third AC) and return by the 16528 Yesvantpur Express (leaves CLT 7.35pm, arrives YPR 8am; ₹ 875 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

Auto rickshaws are available locally and run by the meter (starting fare from ₹20). The most convenient option, however, is to have your own transport. We used and liked the services of Travel Cart India (00-91-484-2663533/44/55; travelcartindia.com, mail@travelcartindia.com; from ₹2,900/ day for an AC indigo [200km/day]).

WHERE TO STAY

AYUSH AYURVEDA ASHRAM:

An accommodation option offered by the CVN Kalaripayattu Nadakkavu itself, this ashram has six well-appointed guest rooms and two treatment rooms (00-91-9349444805; cvnkalaripattu.com/ayush.php, sunilkalaripattu@yahoo.com; No 12/56C, near Government LP School, PO Ernakulam, Kozhikode; ₹2,000 for an AC room, ₹1,500 for a non-AC room). It also offers vegetarian meals (₹350/person for breakfast, lunch and dinner).

The Gateway Hotel: Rooms span the gamut from basic to upscale suites at this Taj property, a smart retreat that houses an ayurvedic hospital with all the mod cons. It serves creative cuisine based on an ayurvedic diet and boasts a luxurious pool (00-91-495-6613000; thegatewayhotels.com, gateway.calicut@tajhotels.com; PT Usha Rd; from ₹5,700 with breakfast).

Harivihar Heritage Homestead:

The focus is on ayurveda and yoga at this boutique hotel set on a stunning property with a traditional bathing pond. This royal ancestral home is 170 years old and filled with antiques. Along with treatment facilities, all meals provided are vegetarian and based on ayurvedic principles (00-91-495-2765865; harivihar.com, admin@harivihar.com; Blathikulam; from ₹7,500 with all meals, ayurveda and yoga packages from ₹13,500).

WHERE TO EAT

Most restaurants open early and stay open late as well. Share a table with the locals at **Bombay Hotel** where, apart from breakfast, teatime is great too. The snacks cupboard brims with ghee-laden treats like *unnakaya* (coconut-stuffed plantain) and *chatti pathiri*, a sweet or savoury layered pastry (00-91-495-2366730; South Beach, Silk St; 6am - 12am; fish curry: ₹80,

An ayurveda-approved stir fry on the special menu at The Gateway Hotel



pathiri: ₹5, biryani chai: ₹16). **Salkara Restaurant**, a no-frills joint that's good value for money, is a short stroll from the class. Try the mango curry with fish or prawns, lacy *appams*, and squid and mussels dry fry (00-91-495-2760062; salkara.com; Wayanad Rd, East Nadakkavu [second outlet: Kannur Rd, West Nadakkavu]; 7am - 11pm; mango curry from ₹150, squid dry fry: ₹130). Those with a sweet tooth shouldn't miss the popular **Sweetmeat (SM) Street** where the bakeries are filled with colourful, glistening slabs of *halva*, coconut-based treats and jars of biscuits. Try **Sankaran Bakery** (00-91-495-2720341; SM St; 8am - 8pm; halva from ₹120/kg).

WHAT TO PACK

You'll be hot and sweaty from the class so pack lots of workout gear, an extra towel, a water bottle, and rain gear in case you want to venture out for meals. *Kalaripayattu* is practised barefoot so you don't need special footwear.

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Most restaurants in town have decent loos and handwashing facilities.

SHOPPING

Khadi Gramodyog Emporium stocks wooden handicrafts, leather goods, cotton and silk saris, and spices (00-91-495-2721962; khadigramodyogemporium.com; SM St; 10am - 7.30pm; handicrafts from ₹50, spices from ₹20).

SAFETY

Kozhikode is safe, but dress conservatively, and stick to well-lit paths at night.

MEDICAL AID

MIMS Hospital is well-equipped to handle emergencies (00-91-495-3911400; mimsindia.com; Mini Bypass Rd, Govindapuram).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

The ideal age for *kalaripayattu* training is seven years; kids are encouraged to sign up for the workshop.

GOOD TO KNOW

* Though a good level of fitness helps, the centre can accommodate people at all levels of fitness.

* Each lesson is about 90 minutes long.

* CVN Kalaripayattu Nadakkavu also offers classes at another location outside the city in a more rural setting, with a dug-out *kalaripattu*.

MAP: RADHA RAMACHANDRAN



Websites:
Indicates that websites on that page are active



Watch out for more interactivity in the magazine

Whether you've got a travel question or want to show off your stunning photos or insider knowledge of a destination, get in touch at lpmagazine@wwm.co.in.

EASY TRIPS



Learn a
New Skill

Learning kalaripayattu in Kozhikode, Kerala

FIGHTING FIT

It isn't often that you can get away with training in the departs of wild boar in adulthood and still emerge a stronger person. Unless, of course, you're in Kozhikode trying to learn kalaripayattu, an ancient martial art.

Kozhikode is a historically significant port city on India's Malabar Coast. It brings much folk tradition (the ritual temple dance of *theyyam*), food (delicious Moplah cuisine) and culture, including one of the world's oldest martial arts. Kalaripayattu takes its name from *kalar*, the multi-tiered gymnasium in which it is practised, and *payattu*, which means fight or exercise in Malayalam. Legend

has it that Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk, travelled to China, preached at a temple and then taught one-eighth monkeys about the 18 hands of Buddha derived from the 18 adavas, or techniques, of Kalaripayattu.

You can learn it, too, at CVN Kalaripayattu Nadakkavu where you will master postures derived from the 18 hands as part of the introductory course. This art form is practised in both the northern and southern parts of Kerala, but the northern style puts more emphasis on *meleipayattu*, or body control exercises, as opposed to the southern style (0495-455-2769; cvnkalaripayattu.com; tanakalar@yahoo.com; Nadakkavu, ₹2,000/person/for lessons).

Above: Advanced Kalaripayattu students demonstrate a routine

The two-day workshop includes morning and evening sessions at which you will learn the kicks, leaps, jumps and stances that are the foundation of this martial art and which will help you build the strength, stamina, flexibility and balance required to advance your training, should you choose to pursue it. The session includes *koonthan* and *ankathar*, which involve the use of sticks and wooden sticks and metal weapons.

While you probably won't get that far, don't be fooled into thinking that the sequence of stances you're learning is mere dance choreography. Each swoosh and lunge is deceptively fierce, designed for attack and defence.

GREAT FROM Kochi, Bangalore

GREAT FOR Fitness fiends

GO NOW
While the monsoon provides some respite from the heat.

After the morning class, you will be famished. Head down to the *Bombay Hotel* for the best breakfast in town; you can mop up fish and chicken in luscious tomato-based curries with the aptly-named rice *pathiri* (paper-thin

rice pancakes), followed by a *biryani*, *chai*, a fancy-looking layered concoction of milk, spiced tea and foam (see *Where to Eat*).

Retreat to a local guesthouse to prepare yourself for an aquaerobic massage, which, wonderfully, is part of your training. Kalaripayattu trains you to activate your *marmas* (vital energy points), and aquaerobics is a great way for healing the various energy points. Before hospitals existed, kalaripayattu practitioners had to treat injuries themselves. This certainly bodies well for new students who can book a full-body oil massage (₹1,000/1 hour), which increases flexibility, eases soreness, and treats any muscle trauma that might have occurred

1. *Ayurveda*

Adhira

2. *Therapies*

3. *Local*

4. *Health*

During training, it's not often you can get a massage with the excuse that it will make you a more skilled practitioner to your book one. Of course, 48 hours isn't enough to master kalaripayattu, which is said to require a minimum of eight years of training under the guidance of a guru. But this aquaerobic massage is a brilliant way to experience this indigenous art form, and will send you home with a travel souvenir you'll feel in your quivering abs, arms and thighs for days to come.

WORDS SHRENA DASHOKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS [TOOTHY KARAT]

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



Video: Offers access to the embedded video or audio file

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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



SRI LANKA Call of the wild



COIMBATORE, TAMIL NADU Sweet revenge

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

- 1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be written to the general public and can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of your office, or the Director-General of your office, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.
- 2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postbox address and relevant rates of the place featured.

3) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on. Only entries with full details will be considered.

- 2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or ramble about the horrible holiday you had last summer.
- 3) Please send us photographs of the places you review or suggest

Mail in your reviews and suggestions to lpmagazine@wwm.co.in



Email: Invites you to submit your Postcards, letters and reviews

Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





MARRAKESH, MOROCCO

Catching some rays

I decided to leave the grey skies of wintry England behind and jump on a flight to Marrakesh. This image was taken on New Year's Day, when I wanted to clear my head by walking around the local *souqs*. The colours and smells were amazing, the odour of pungent spices and tobacco hanging in the air. The locals were shopping and going about their daily business. I found the light coming through the roof slats so beautiful, almost Biblical. I loved Marrakesh – it was so different and I found it completely awe-inspiring. Next stop, Vietnam...

There are 18 *souqs* in Marrakesh, historically divided into areas specialising in particular goods, from leather to carpets, pottery to food



Alasdair Boyle is a keen amateur photographer from East Sussex.





Today, Vernazza's primary industry is tourism, but, throughout the centuries, the isolated village was famed for its fishing, wine and olive oil production

VERNAZZA, ITALY
Cinque port

My girlfriend and I love Italy – for its food, wine and, of course, views like this. It's one of our favourite places to visit. Having visited Tuscany the year before, the coast – and in particular the Cinque Terre region – was a must for our holiday. We spent a week using trains to jump between coastal towns, drinking wine and eating ice cream (the basil and olive gelato was a surprise success). We had walked up this track overlooking Vernazza bay several times during our stay in the town, but, on the evening I got my shot, the fading light made it look especially beautiful. It really set the mood before our *aperitivo* back in town.



Andrew Hoyle is a technology journalist living in London.



The town of Sampa lies on the border with Côte d'Ivoire in the region of Brong-Ahafo, known for its agricultural output

SAMPA, GHANA

Cash crop

Monday is market day in Sampa. As I was on my way to the fruit stands, I walked by this woman who smiled and greeted me in the local dialect. She pointed to the pile of maize in front of her and asked me to purchase some. I politely declined and was about to walk on, but then she pointed to the camera around my neck and then to herself. I took one picture and showed her the image; suffice to say, she was ecstatic and called her fellow market ladies to come see it.



Suradee Thongkiattikul works as a US Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana.

NEW ORLEANS, USA

Top brass

This photo was taken in Jackson Square as I roamed through New Orleans on my first day in the city. I was taking dozens of pictures for my travel blog, and loved how the late-afternoon sun added a golden glow to the square. I was overwhelmed by the ubiquitous presence of music in the French Quarter, by the picturesque colonial architecture and the unrelenting heat. New Orleans is like a Disneyland for adults, and exploring this city is such an exhilarating ride.



Olga Nikolskaya lives in London and spent a few days in New Orleans.



Jackson Square, built in 1721 and modelled after the Place des Vosges in Paris, is known for its raucous buskers



Writer Franz Kafka spent most of his life in Prague, and the city often made an appearance in his stories and novels



**PRAGUE,
CZECH REPUBLIC**

All lined up

I took this photograph from atop a bell tower in Prague. Despite having a shivering shutter finger thanks to the winter chill, I just had to capture the fascinating view. The juxtaposition of straight slanting lines on the right and the random chaotic design on the left shows a clear discrepancy, beautiful in its own right. Pretty much like the city where this picture was taken.



Chennai-based entrepreneur **Pravin Shekar** loves travelling and enjoys capturing people and street views.



Inle Lake contains a large number of endemic species, including one species of fish found nowhere else in the world

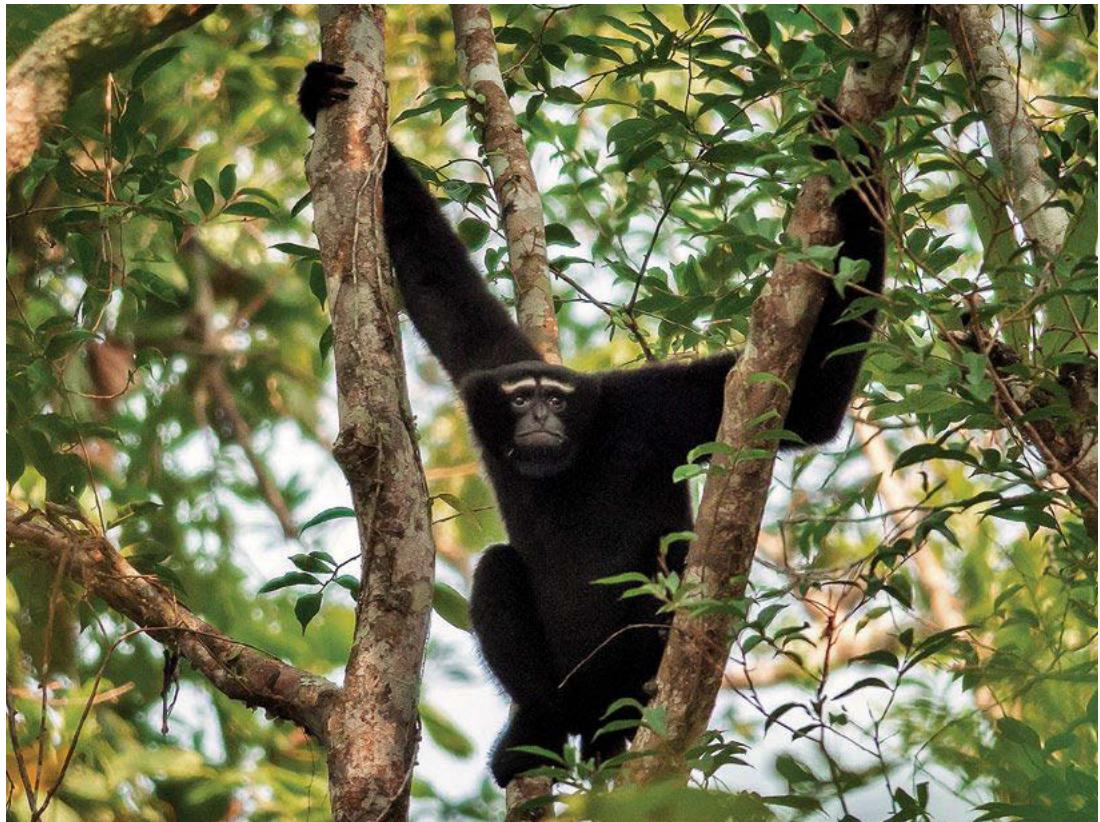
HOOLLONGAPAR GIBBON SANCTUARY, ASSAM

Aping about

Hoolock gibbons are usually shy and use the dense forests they inhabit as cover. On a recent photographic safari, I tried – and failed – to capture a family of these gibbons at the sanctuary. It was difficult to capture them in their habitat as they kept jumping from one tree to another at lightning speed. I had almost given up, when, suddenly, I came across this male gibbon, who was sitting perfectly still, making for a perfect picture.



Randeep Singh is a regular contributor to the Postcards section.



The hoolock gibbon, after which the sanctuary is named, is the only tailless primate found in India

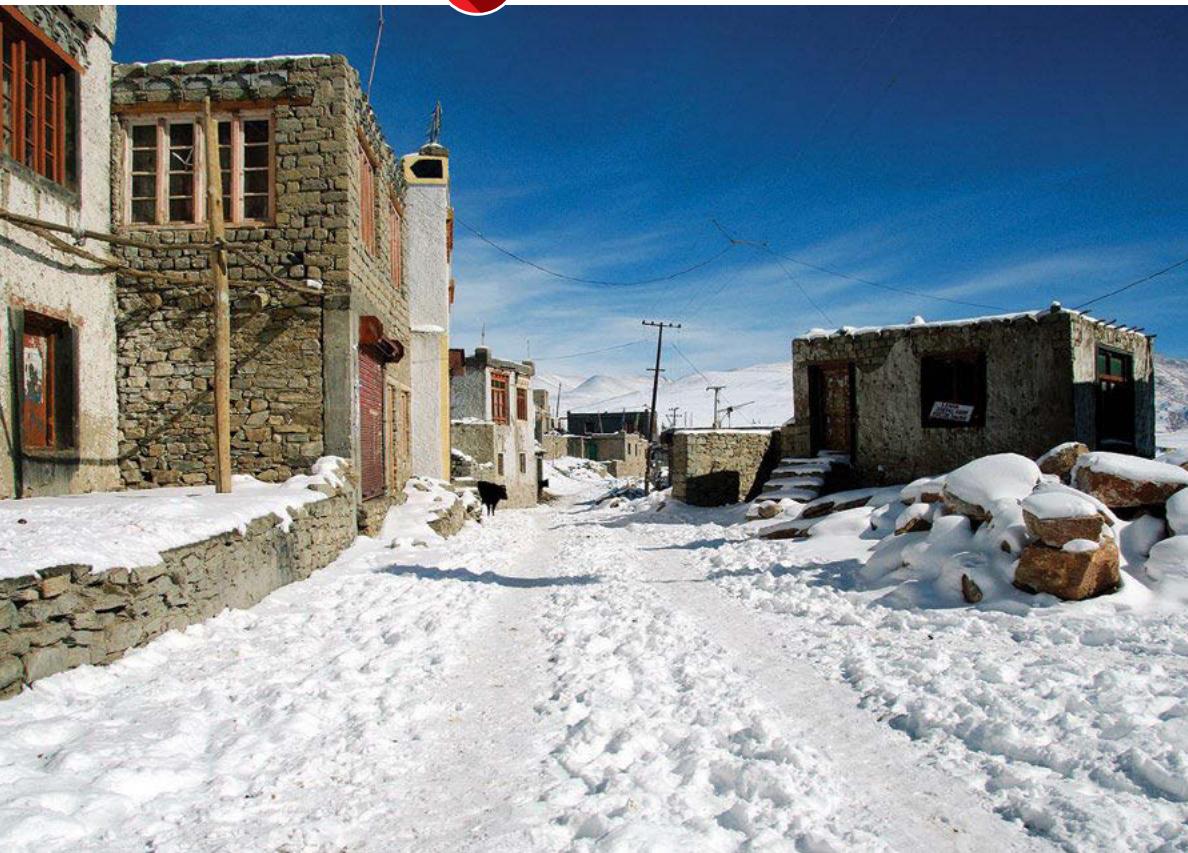
SHAN HILLS, MYANMAR

Hooked on

We spotted this Intha fisherman during our trip to Inle Lake in Myanmar. The Intha people are known for their one-legged rowing. How does this work? The fishermen propel their flat-bottomed skiffs by placing one leg on the stern and wrapping the other leg around the oar to drive the blade through the water in a snake-like motion.



Dr Anita Kothiala is a paediatrician from Gujarat who enjoys travelling.



Rupshu Valley, a high-altitude desert that lies southeast of Leh, is actually a western extension of the Tibetan Plateau

RUPSHU VALLEY, LADAKH

Keeping track

Last January, an unfortunate landslide on the Zanskar River forced us to reroute our trip to Ladakh. This unexpected turn of events brought us face to face with the lesser explored parts of Ladakh. I took this picture in a village near Tso (lake) Moriri. Barring a handful of villagers, their animals, and a police camp, we were probably the only ones who visited that place during winter, when the temperature dropped to a freezing -37°C. These tracks were the only sign of civilisation there that day.



Kolkata-based **Sourjya Roy** is a college professor and amateur photographer.

PUSHKAR, RAJASTHAN

Rubbed the wrong way

This photo was taken in Pushkar during the annual camel fair. The gathering of well decorated camels at the fair is impressive. These two camels were awaiting their turn to participate in the camel dance, an interesting event at which the animals are judged by how well they dance to the beat of drums. While waiting, the duo started nuzzling each other. However, their owners were quick to separate them, because, after all, it is a competition!



Kausik Saha is an IT professional who travels to experience new cultures.



During the fair, the population of Pushkar swells to over two lakh people, with an inflow of pilgrims, camel traders, and tourists

Jampey Lhakhang Drup commemorates the establishment of a 7th-century temple and takes place in late October or early November



BUMTHANG, BHUTAN
Sword play

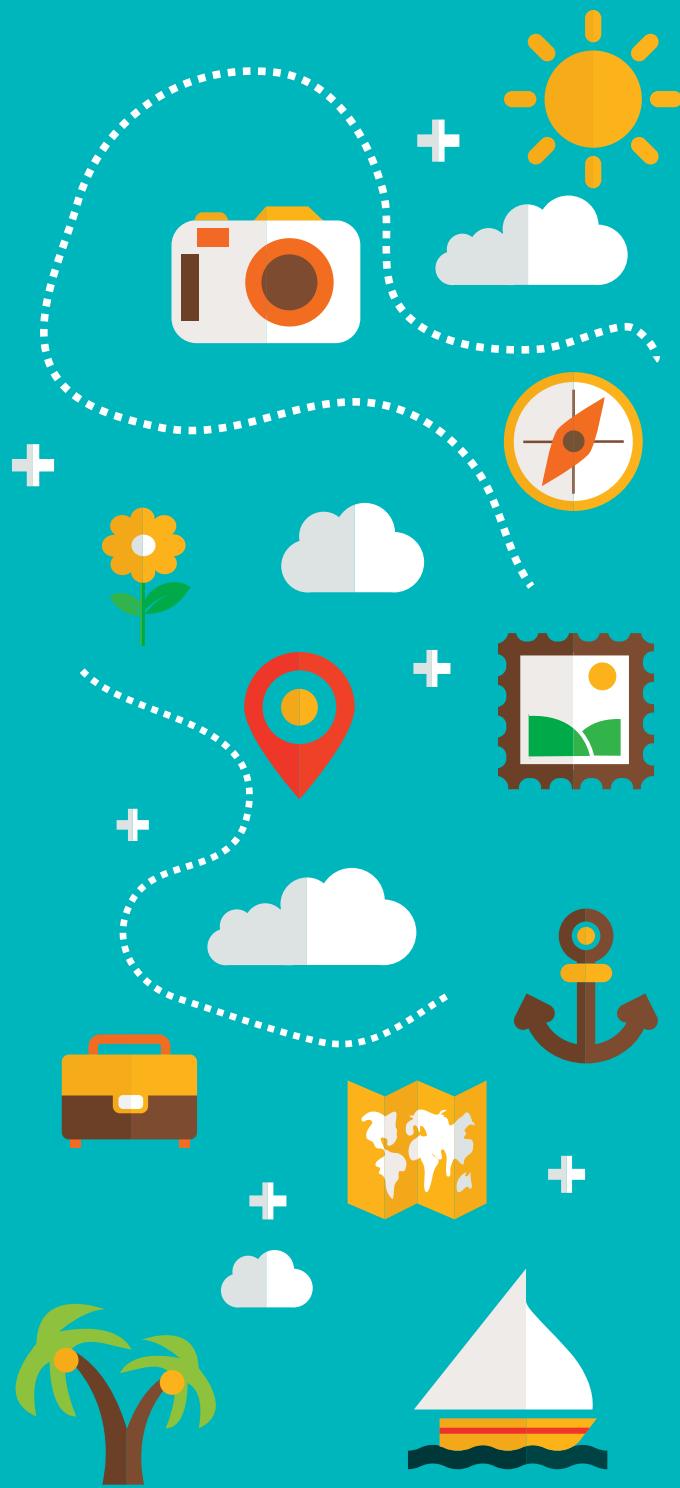
I timed my visit to Bhutan to coincide with the Jampey Lhakhang Drup festival at Jambay Lhakhang temple. Local people arrive early and spread rugs out around the dance area so they can enjoy picnics and a gossip. A kind lady noticed I was sitting on the flagstones and offered me a corner of her rug. This got me very close to the action. The dances are performed by monks who transform themselves into warrior spirits. The monks spin hypnotically and gradually quicken until they appear to be whirling, wrathful demons. At the climax of the dance, only one monk is left alone to slay the demon – in my photo, the dancer performs the final coup de grâce to finish off the evil spirit.



Ross Kennedy is from Scotland and works as an engineer in Dublin.

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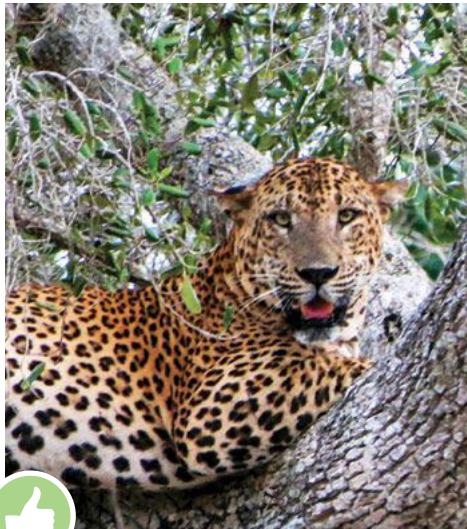
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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



SRI LANKA

Call of the wild



Sushama Sunil Parchure
from Mumbai recommends
a visit to Sri Lanka's
Yala National Park

What worked: I went to Sri Lanka and the Maldives on holiday and, of the two, I really enjoyed Sri Lanka. I visited Dambulla, Sigiriya, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Bentota, Colombo and, my favourite, Yala National Park, there. The park consists of five blocks of which two are open right now. Situated in the south-east of the island nation, the park hosts a variety of ecosystems, ranging from moist monsoon forest to freshwater and marine wetlands. There are over 200 bird species in the park and a few of them are endemic, like the Sri Lanka grey hornbill. The other famous creatures in this park are elephants and leopards. We were lucky to see a leopard resting in the branches of a huge tree. We also saw water buffaloes, peacocks, crocodiles and much more. This is certainly a place not to be missed on your visit to Sri Lanka.

What didn't: Nothing comes to mind.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Yala National Park:

yalasrilanka.lk; 6.30am–6pm Oct 16–Aug 31

COIMBATORE, TAMIL NADU

Sweet revenge



Delhi-based Dr Harsh Wardhan
recommends a visit
to the Revenge Temple
in Pollachi, Coimbatore

What worked: While travelling from Madurai to Ooty, our cab driver, Kannan, suggested we take a detour to Pollachi to visit a famous temple. Kannan's description of the temple had us very intrigued. This shrine is very popular, especially among women devotees. Locals refer to it as the Revenge Temple, or the Neethi Kal (Stone of Justice). People who are harassed by their relatives or friends, businessmen, politicians and many such devotees (understandably) throng this shrine. The main goddess, called Masaniamman, is a 15ft female idol with four hands – two resting on the ground and the other two raised, carrying a snake, a skull, a trident and a drum. Devotees offer red chillies and lemons to her and put down their problems on a piece of paper – it's believed that prayers are answered in 19 days. I never could have imagined that such a temple existed somewhere.

What didn't: Photography isn't allowed inside the temple.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Pollachi is 44km from Coimbatore.

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS
IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

**PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS
OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW
OR SUGGEST**

Mail in your reviews and suggestions
to lpmagazine@wwm.co.in



Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter of the month

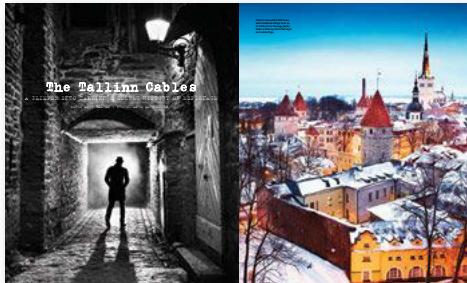


Long-lost friend

When the magazine arrives at home, it feels like a friend has returned from a whirlwind trip; someone who can't wait to show me all the pictures, tell me all the stories, and nudge me to get off the couch, but who also tells me that it's okay to just stay tucked up in bed with the pictures and prose. It's this connect you create that makes me believe that I can touch the pictures and be instantly transported to that shimmering beach or that quaint café. Vicarious living aside, it's been a good year, travel-wise, for me so far. Stumbling upon the names of places that I've visited recently in the earlier editions of *LPMI* is also a magically happy feeling. Thanks for the stunning pictures, giggle-inducing writing and inspiring friendship. Keep up the brilliant work.

– Thrishika, Bangalore

History buff



Every time I read *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, I feel excited to learn about and exploring new places. The colourful photographs transport me from my apartment in Mumbai to exotic destinations. I absolutely love travelling to places that have historical significance, as it's a way to learn about fascinating civilisations and cultures. The article on Tallinn (*The Tallinn Cables*, *LPMI* June 2015) was my favourite as it not only shed light on the aesthetic beauty of the place, but delved into its history too. I look forward to reading the next issue.

– Simone Vesavevala, via email

Travel bug

On a cold January evening, a photograph of a South Korean man invited me to pick up *Lonely Planet Magazine India*. That was my first edition and I'm a new addition to your fan club. I've been a travel addict for many years now and reading about different places is a cheap medicine for this disease compared to the actual cure, which would have me travelling around the world. What I love about *LPMI* is how reader-centric it is. You encourage us to not just share words of appreciation, but pictures and

experiences of our travels as well. This offers me an idea of what other travel enthusiasts – not just writers and editors – are exploring. Any magazine can make you feel connected to its stories, but *LPMI* goes a step further. It makes me feel connected to fellow readers of the magazine. I feel connected to the travel spirit of 68-year-old Anila Dhairyawan, and couldn't agree more with Yogesh Jotwani's advice to tread softly (*Letters*, *LPMI* May 2015). More than anything, you've inspired me and encouraged me to come out and voice my love for travel and my love for you.

– Shristi Jain, Mumbai

A good influence



My favourite thing to do when I feel like taking a break at work is looking up unknown, exotic destinations, and then daydreaming about them for hours. But seriously, I enjoy armchair travel as much as the real thing. In fact, if anyone in my family is planning a holiday I'm their go-to person, as I'm constantly reading up about new places. Naturally, *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is my Bible. My brother and his wife were planning their honeymoon and he came to me for help. After reading your June

2015 issue, I came up with so many cool suggestions that it confused him at first, but later convinced him to try something offbeat like Cuba!

– Harsha Kansara, Surat

Pack up and go



I've been reading the magazine for four years now, and there have been so many changes. It has evolved in terms of design and content. Stories are easier to read and pages are more attractive, while the content is so much more useful. I'm travelling to Thailand soon, and I'm actually using the exact same itinerary featured in one of your stories ('The Perfect Trip: Thailand's Islands', March 2015). I think yours is probably the only magazine to offer almost custom-made itineraries!

– Gwen D, Mumbai

JAZZ BAG, MANHATTAN PHONE COVER WITHOUT CHAIN, L WALLET

Engineered from soft, genuine Cow Banjo leather, the uber smart Manhattan Collection from Viari is a must-have for the metrosexual man on the move. The Jazz Bag, with its exterior pocket and well-organised interiors, fits in your tablet or iPad Mini, and more. The Manhattan Phone Cover without chain uses magnetic closure to keep your mobile safe, while the stylish L Wallet is designed to store your cash neatly.

For more details on the Manhattan collection, log on to viari.in

The writer of this issue's Letter of the Month wins this Viari Jazz Bag, Manhattan Phone Cover without chain and L Wallet in tan shade. To write in to the magazine, email us at lpmagazine@wwm.co.in



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MAGAZINE
INDIA

Globetrotter

A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

PG 28 World on your Plate: *Poisson cru*, the raw fish salad from **French Polynesia**, brings the sea to your mouth

PG 29 10 Things to Do in... **Reykjavik**: All you need to know about maxing out the capital of Iceland

PG 36 You Ask Us: Wondering about **swimming with sharks**? Tom Hall tells you why it's okay

Ecotourism, handled well, encourages local communities to look after sharks. In You Ask Us (pg 36)





The Photo Story

EWEN BELL



Festive spirits

Bhutan is one of the last cultures to escape the influence of globalisation. I first went there in 2010, and now I plan my trips around the traditional festivals. Every temple in Bhutan has a festival once a year, which centres on traditional Buddhist dances intended to bring good fortune. They're full of colour and community – you see the people of Bhutan at their happiest and most exuberant, and dressed in their finest. The dances are based on stories from Buddhist scriptures and often revolve around subduing demons or recalling great victories of the spirit. The most prestigious is the Black Hat Dance, a long performance with flowing robes – everybody wants to be there for that. The biggest festivals are held in Paro and Thimphu in the spring, but I took these photos in Prakhar, a small community in Bumthang in central Bhutan. I spent most of the day inside the temple as the monks prepared for each dance. They enjoyed foreigners attending as this brings good fortune – the more, the merrier. →

Ewen Bell is an Australian travel photographer whose subjects range from the Silk Road to Antarctica (ewenbell.com).



The Black Hat Dance has the most elaborate costumes. It tells the story of how a monk killed an anti-Buddhist king

Facing: These drums will be used during the festival by the monks, who provide the dance and music



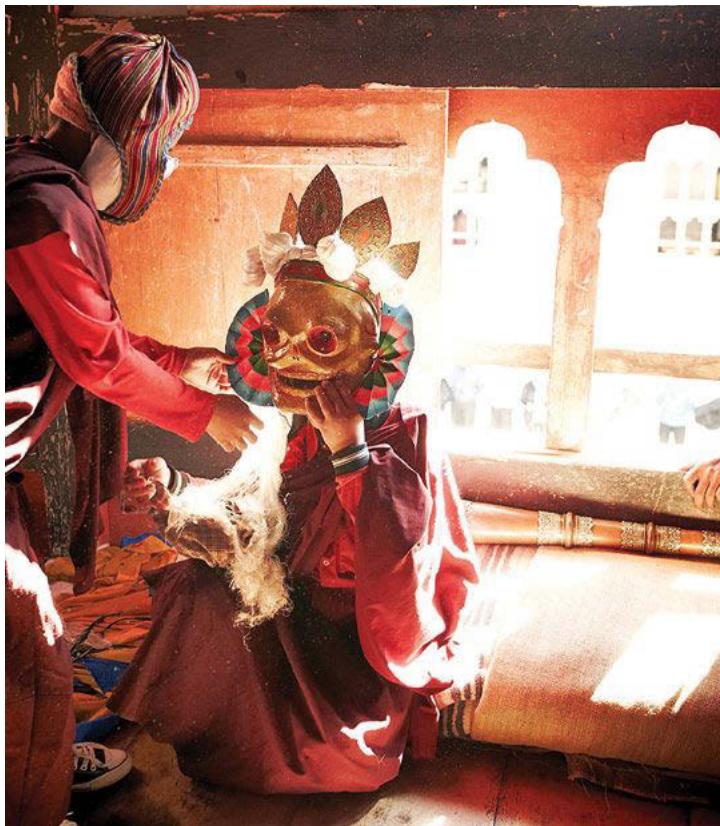
The five skulls on this mask show that it represents one of the "wrathful protectors" who banish evil spirits. Masks and robes are the essence of the performances, and great reverence accompanies the quiet process by which the monks slip into their characters →



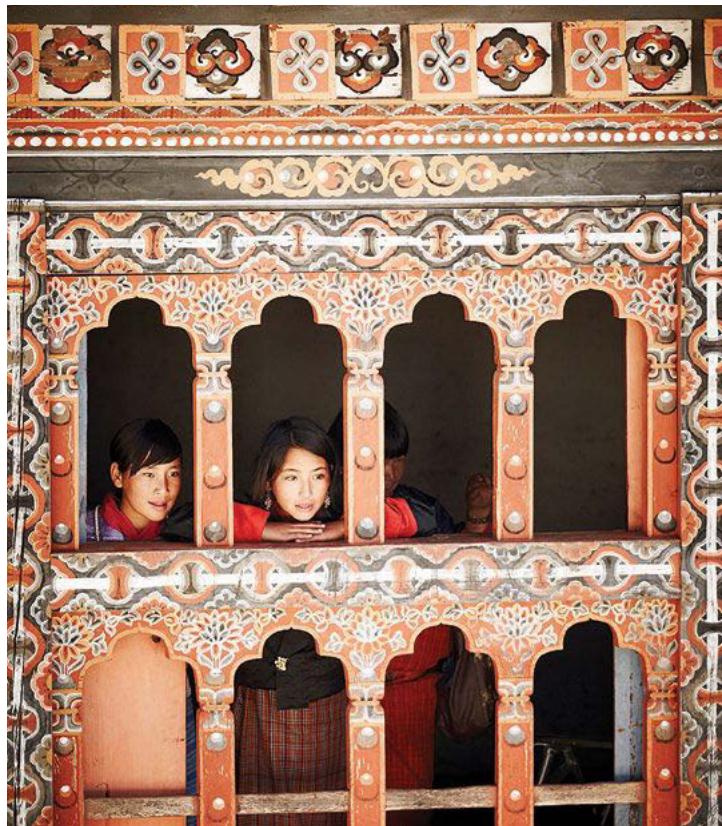
A young novice shows off his dance moves after the festival. It's an exciting day for novices, and brings out the extrovert in them



The masks – like this 'wrathful protector' – are works of art in their own right, carved from wood and embellished with paint and fabric



A novice monk tries on a mask for size. This mask is used for *durdag* – the dance of the lords of the cremation grounds



These girls are watching the show from a typically Bhutanese-style window of one of the classrooms that surround the courtyard 

Poisson cru

French Polynesia

POYNESIANS usually eat their gloriously fresh seafood *au naturel* – like in this raw fish and vegetable salad kissed by the tartness of lime juice and the creaminess of coconut milk. Served with rice, *poisson cru* is eaten for breakfast, lunch or dinner, invoking the balmy flower scented air of the turquoise-bound islands that make up French Polynesia.

- * 500g deepwater fish (rawas, tuna, salmon), cut into 2.5cm cubes
- * ¾ cup fresh lime juice
- * 2 tomatoes, chopped
- * ½ small onion, finely chopped
- * 1 cucumber, finely chopped
- * 1 carrot, grated
- * 1 capsicum, thinly sliced
- * 1 cup coconut milk
- * Salt and pepper to taste
- * Chopped spring onion or parsley, chopped

1. Soak the fish cubes in a bowl of salted fresh water (though the locals swear seawater makes the fish more tender) while preparing the vegetables.
2. Remove the fish from the salt water and place in a large salad bowl. Add the lemon or lime juice and marinate for about three minutes.
3. Pour off about half to two-thirds of the juice (depending on how tart you like it), then add the vegetables and toss together with the fish.
4. Pour the coconut milk over the salad and season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Garnish with chopped spring onion or parsley and serve with white rice.



A CHINESE TWIST

A Chinese-style *poisson cru* has the raw fish marinated in oil and vinegar, mixed with Chinese pickled veggies, ginger and, sometimes, garlic. This *poisson cru à la chinoise* is more sour than the classic *poisson cru au lait coco*.

10 things to do in...

Reykjavik



Eat

8 Iceland's proximity to the ocean makes its cuisine predictable, but the chefs here put emphasis on the quality of ingredients. One such chef, Úlfar Eysteinsson, runs **3 Frakkar**, which serves up traditional Icelandic food (00-354-552-3939; 3frakkar.com; *Baldursgata 14*; check website for timings; mains from ₹1,900).

The gigantic waterfall at Gullfoss ('golden falls') and the canyon at Thingvellir, home to the country's largest lake and the site of Iceland's first parliament, is also evidence of the American and Eurasian tectonic plates moving apart. (www.thingvellir.is).

6 Iceland has a rich history with the big, blue mammals, and **Whales of Iceland** is dedicated solely to them. The state-of-the-art museum is the biggest of its kind in Europe and boasts 23 whale species. Step inside and you're instantly enveloped in a calm, marine atmosphere. The exhibition also tries to educate visitors about the country's conservation efforts (00-354-571-0077; whalesoficeland.is; *Fiskislóð 23-25*; summer: 9am-7pm, winter: 9am-6pm; ₹1,400).



9 At the **Laundromat Café**, you can juggle between doing your laundry, browsing its huge collection of books and gorging on food and wine and around 40 kinds of beer. You also have the option of just lounging around with a selection of board games and free wi-fi, making this a great place for kids (00-354-587-7555; thelaundromatcafe.com; *Austurstræti 9*; 8am-12am Mon-Thur, 8am-1pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, 9am-12am Sun; from ₹1,300).

Stay

7 It might sound ridiculous to go to a beach in Iceland, but some folks at Nautholsvik have undertaken an ambitious project that mixes cold seawater and hot geothermal water to create the



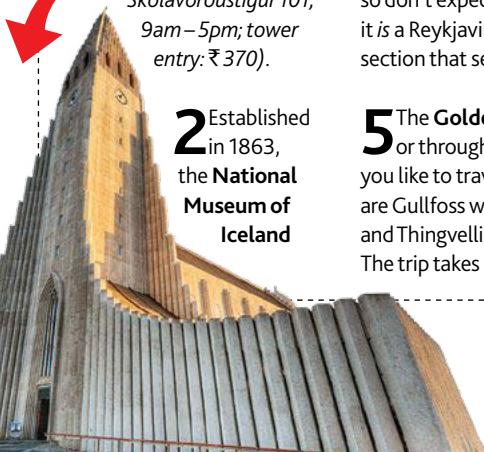
Nautholsvik Geothermal Beach (00-354-511-6630; www.nautholsvik.is; *Nauthól-svegi*; winter: 11am-1pm & 5pm-7pm Mon & Wed 11am-1pm Tues, Thur, Fri, 11am-3pm Sat, summer: 10am-7pm; winter: ₹230, free in summer).

10 Centrally located, **Kex Hostel**, a former biscuit factory, is a good base for exploring Reykjavik. Made up of retro furniture and with a gastro pub and a great breakfast buffet, this is a smart pick. Single, double and family rooms are also on offer (00-354-561-6060; kexhostel.is, info@kexhostel.is; *Skúlagata 28*; doubles from ₹5,500).



See

1 **Hallgrímskirkja**, Iceland's biggest church, is a familiar sight on Icelandic postcards. Its radical style proved to be controversial at the time of its construction and its creator, Guðjón Samúelsson, didn't live to see its completion. The exterior, with its dramatic steeple, is a classic fusion of primordial and futuristic styles, resembling a volcano or glacial formation. Its most prominent feature, though, is a colossal German organ built in 1992. Even if churches aren't your thing, you must visit this place for its stunning 360° view over Reykjavik (00-354-510-1000; hallgrimskirkja.is; *Skólavörðustígur 101*; 9am-5pm; tower entry: ₹370).



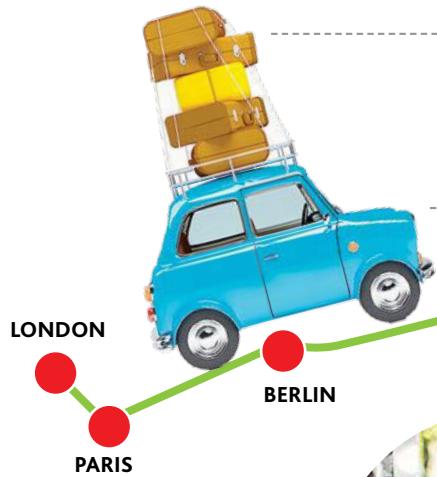
2 Established in 1863, the **National Museum of Iceland**

is home to treasures that were once housed in different attics, namely those of the Cathedral, House of Corrections, Parliament and National Bank until 1950. The collections document Iceland's struggle under Danish and Norwegian rule (00-354-530-2200; thjodminjasafn.is; *Suðurgötu 41*; summer: 10am-5pm, winter: 10am-5pm Tues-Sun; ₹700).

3 Once the largest construction project in Iceland, the **Old Harbor** offers a number of services ranging from puffin-watching tours to sea angling. You can also sample the delectable cuisine offered by restaurants here. This is also a lovely area to take a stroll, enjoy the sea breeze and gaze across the bay at the picturesque Mount Esja. The harbour is also home to the Viking Maritime Museum (www.oldharborreykjavik.com).

4 Not surprisingly, the only flea market in Iceland is a great place to hunt for unusual Icelandic antiques and second-hand goods on the weekends. The selection at **Kolaportid Flea Market** isn't the greatest, so don't expect too much. Nevertheless, it is a Reykjavik institution. It also has a food section that sells local eats.

5 The **Golden Circle Tour** can be done on your own or through a tour operator (depending on how you like to travel). The highlights of this day-long tour are Gullfoss waterfall (above), The Great Geysir (right) and Thingvellir (or Þingvellir) – these form the Golden Circle. The trip takes in jetting geysers and vast glacial waterfalls.



Arrivals

LONDON

MOSCOW

KAZAN

YEKATERINBURG

BERLIN

PARIS

Festivals

The annual celebration of theatre, **VANCOUVER FRINGE FESTIVAL**, returns this year with more than 700 performances by some 89 artistes over 11 days from September 10–20, 2015. The opening night features celebrations in the form of a concert on Granville Island, which also hosts a bar with live music, and two-minute teasers for upcoming shows (www.vancouverfringe.com).

BOOK
NOW!

It's only fitting that the **22ND BRITISH CLASSIC CAR MEETING** will be held in one of the hippest towns in Switzerland – **St Moritz**. Held from July 10 to 12, 2015, the car show will see beauts like Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Aston Martin & Lagonda, Jaguar & Daimler, and Austin-Healey on display. On day one of the show, starting 12pm, the cars will roll down to the Piazza dal Rosatsch, where they'll stop for several minutes to be admired. Day two sees the vehicles in action in neighbouring Veltlin during the rally. You can check the exact circuit online under the tab 'Roadbook' (www.bccm-stmoritz.ch).

BOOK
NOW!

When a beer garden comes with a traditional fair and market, you've got an ideal place at which to while away the afternoon. The annual **MAGDALENENFEST**, which takes place in the pretty Königlichen Hirschgarten (Royal Deer Garden) right next to one of **Munich's** largest beer gardens, ticks all the boxes.

Feast on skewer-grilled fish, roast sausages, *bratwurst*, *schweinswuerstel* and chocolate-covered fruit, and wash it all down with cold beer at this nine-day festival held from July 11 to 19, 2015. There are mini scooters, merry-go-rounds, a swing boat and Ferris wheel, shooting galleries and pony rides to keep little ones entertained too.

You can't be at them all, but even if you missed KC and the Sunshine Band (right), the **FREMONT STREET EXPERIENCE ROCK OF VEGAS SUMMER CONCERT SERIES** still has cool headliners ready to own the stage in **Las Vegas**. There's Theory of a Deadman on July 18, 2015, the Spin Doctors & Cherry Poppin' Daddies on August 1, 2015, and Kansas & Blue Oyster Cult on September 6, 2015. They're all free, they all start at 9pm, and downtown hotel-casinos have rooms, food and drink all at special rates – just so the buzz don't come down (www.vegasexperience.com).



GLOW IN THE SKY

Now, you can strike the Aurora Borealis off your bucket list even before you land in Iceland. Dressed to show the best of the country's beauty,

Icelandair's HEKLA AURORA gets you in the travel mood right away. The Boeing 757 is now bedecked in the colours of the gorgeous Icelandic winter landscape on the outside, and the interiors are surreally lit to resemble the slow-flowing waves of the Northern Lights. Few flights get as dramatic as this, and we mean that in the best way possible (www.icelandair.us/hekla-aurora).



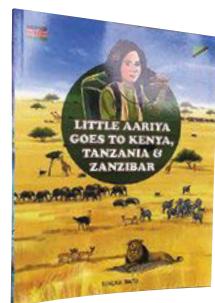
IRCTC flight for your plight

Didn't make the cut for your train? Fly instead and arrive earlier (for a price, of course).

IRCTC's teamed up with **GoAir**, to offer its dropped waitlisted travellers discounted fares on last-minute flights to their destination. You need to be on the waitlist after the chart's prepared, and we don't know the sectors offered yet. Check the website for the fine print (www.air:irctc.co.in).

New Book

Little Aariya goes to Kenya, Tanzania & Zanzibar



Meet Aariya, who, with her parents, travels across East Africa, visiting Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar to discover the wonders of the African safari, picking up a whole lot of knowledge along the way. They witness a kill, see the competition between wildebeest and crocodile at the crossing of the Mara River as part of the Great Migration, and observe the interactions between the different species that make the savannah the thriving world it is. Career travel rep and lifelong travel enthusiast Renuka Natu's debut book for little ones uses simple language and colourful illustrations to narrate Aariya's story, and packs a few lessons in geography and natural history in for good measure too (*Partridge India*).

Through Russia with love

Russia has unveiled plans for an almost 20,000km superhighway, which, if realised, would make it possible to travel by car from the UK to the USA: the road trip to end all road trips.

UELEN

ALASKA



Dine under the sea

Six metres beneath the waterline, 500 metres offshore, the underwater nightclub, **SUBSIX**, redesigned to mirror its aquatic surroundings, is one of the most sought-after venues in the Maldives. Accessed by speedboat from the **PER AQUUM Niyama**, it's the place for midnight proposals, wedding ceremonies and champagne breakfasts – or just fine dining watched over by the reef sharks amid the coral-clad architecture outside. Guests can look forward to descending a dramatic three-tier staircase and sitting in chairs that mimic anemone fingers below a ceiling dripping with capiz shells. The central bar is inspired by a clam, glowing softly in the mood lighting. Past the floor-to-ceiling glass windows, the marine world goes about its business. It's the closest you can get to a reef without mask or wetsuit (www.niyama.peraquum.com/dining/Subsix/).



Leh yourself out

WHITE COLLAR HIPPIE's announced dates for its road trips through **Ladakh** this year, running from July to September, and there's a long (12-day) and a shorter, nine-day one.

We're leaning toward the long one – that's three more days of crooning Mountain momma in that otherworldly stunner of a region. Check the website (whitecollarhippie.com) for updates.



5

Minutes with Kieron Pollard

The Trinidadian cricketer plays for the West Indies and the Mumbai Indians

When you're younger, you're more excited about travelling.

You want to have more experiences. Now, having to get on an airplane all the time can get tedious. Still, it's rewarding to be able to see so many different places. I enjoy playing in India and Australia. South Africa is also very green and very beautiful.

There are many places I'd really like to visit

– Spain, France... basically, the whole of Europe, a continent I haven't been to much. And Mexico.

India is very exciting.

I spend a lot of time in Mumbai and I really enjoy it here. I've stayed here for many years now; it's like a second home to me.

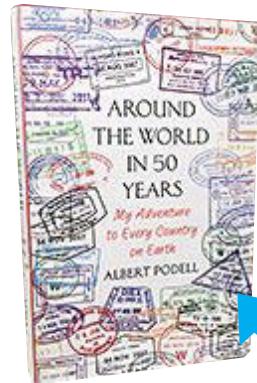
I also find myself in New Delhi a lot, and I recently went to Goa on a family holiday; it was a very relaxing and enjoyable experience.

India and Trinidad and Tobago are very similar.

Certain foods are similar, and there is a great engagement in culture. The people are also very fun-loving and welcoming of visitors. The environment is very relaxed. Dishes like 'doubles' in T&T are good vegetarian options for Indian visitors. There is no place like the Caribbean.

Just enjoy yourself and be open-minded when you travel.

Don't think too much about what to wear and how to do things right; focus instead on experiencing everything fully.



Around the World in 50 Years

Seventy-eight-year-old Albert Podell's passport most certainly trumps yours. The former *Playboy* editor, author and adventurer has travelled to 196 countries over a period of 50 years, and lived to talk about it. Through his travels, he has encountered everything from run-ins with guerillas in Yemen to being attacked by flying crabs in Algeria and being interrogated by the Cuban secret police. Told with humour and insight, Podell helps the reader live vicariously through him, travelling to regions left unexplored by most. Although he often comes across as pompous and egotistical, this book is worth picking up for the sheer thrill of vicariously living out all the crazy experiences (St Martin's Press; ₹1,365).

Five Freebies: Chicago

1 MILLENNIUM PARK, Downtown's public art-studded showpiece, is a trove of freebies in summer, with free garden tours, yoga classes and kids' activities.

But nothing beats the free concerts at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, especially the weekend classical gigs. Patrons bring wine and picnics to set the scene as the sun dips, the skyscraper lights flicker on, and glorious music fills the twilight (00-1-312-742-1168; millenniumpark.org; 201, East Randolph St; 6am–11pm).

2 Stands of purple cabbages, red radishes and bright-hued produce sprawl across Lincoln Park at GREEN CITY MARKET, Chicago's biggest farmers' market. Follow your nose to the free demo tent, where local cooks prepare dishes – say, rice crêpes with a mushroom *gastrique* (a sauce made with caramelised sugar) – using market produce (greencitymarket.org; 1817, North Clark St; 7am–1pm Wed & Sat, May 2–Oct 31).

3 Pop into the small gallery that is the MONEY MUSEUM inside the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and you'll emerge richer than when you entered. Literally, since the museum provides a bag of cash to take home (if only it wasn't shredded), and figuratively, in terms of knowledge. Get a photo of yourself clutching the million-

dollar-stuffed briefcase for the money shot (00-1-312-322-2400; chicagofed.org; 230, South LaSalle St; 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri).

4 'How many fond fools serve mad jealousy?' The question lingers in the evening air while families sit rapt before the makeshift stage at SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARKS. *The Comedy of Errors*, the Bard's tale about mistaken identity, and his other hits, travels to 17 neighbourhood parks between July 19 and August 16 and provides the answer free (chicagoshakes.com/parks).

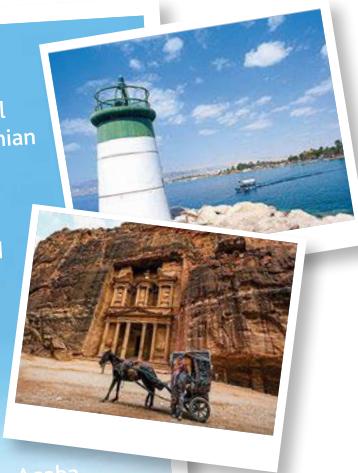
5 NORTH AVENUE BEACH, Chicago's most popular strand of sand, wafts a southern California vibe. Buff teams spike volleyballs, kids build sandcastles, fit young things run, cycle and rollerblade along the lakefront, and everyone jumps in for a swim. Bands rock the steamboat-shaped beach house, which serves ice cream and margaritas in equal measure. A walk on the curving breakwater yields postcard skyline views (cpdbeaches.com; 1600, North Lake Shore Dr).



Karla Zimmerman, author of Lonely Planet's *Chicago*, has lived in the city for 20 years.

**JORDAN WITHOUT VISA FEES**

Visa fees have been waived for all visitors coming in through Jordanian tour operators and spending a minimum of two consecutive nights in Jordan. If you come in through land borders, you'll find the fee reduced from ₹ 3,500 to about ₹ 900 if you spend three consecutive nights. Additionally, departure tax and entry visa have been waived for all low-cost and charter flights departing from King Hussein International Airport in Aqaba. What's not to like, eh?

**Best of both worlds**

The perks of Business Class at the price of Economy Class? Yes! SINGAPORE AIRLINES has unveiled its Premium Economy Class.

The first flight will take off on August 9, 2015, to Sydney before being introduced to other destinations such as Beijing, New Delhi, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, London, Mumbai, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo and Zürich. Fliers can expect more leg room, calf-rests and foot-bars, individual in-seat power supply, two USB ports, a cocktail table, and more stowage space. You can even avail the Book the Cook service,

which lets you order a selection of main courses in advance, as well as priority check-in and baggage handling, with a generous baggage allowance of 35kg. Singapore Airlines is also expanding its reach with a tie-up with Croatia

Airlines, as a result of a codeshare agreement between the Star Alliance partners, thus offering better connectivity between the two countries (www.singaporeair.com).



Splurge!

If you have deep pockets, an extra-special occasion coming up or have received a particularly handsome bonus this year, check out these fancy offers that promise to take you to the moon and back.

Mandarin Oriental Tokyo offers you a chance to see Mount Fuji by air. The **HELICOPTER FLYCATION** package starts at about ₹4 lakhs (cue: slow whistle) and offers one night's stay for two in the Oriental Suite, a private helicopter charter cruise to Mt Fuji (approx 80 minutes long), limousine transfer to the helipad and hotel, breakfast, a bottle of Ruinart Brut Rosé Champagne NV, and a seasonal pound cake (www.mandarinoriental.com/tokyo).

Make your next girlie getaway a grand one with **Belmond Charleston Place's STYLE-CATION** package in South Carolina, USA. For \$ 1,220 (₹ 76,000 approx), you and your BFF will get accommodation, 50-minute facials at the spa, haircut and style (worth \$ 100 each) at Article 5 Salon, a one-on-one fashion consultation and a \$ 100 gift certificate at Hampden Clothing. The offer is valid until

December 27, 2015. Start saving! (www.charlestonplace.com/stylecation)

The very fancy **BACCARAT HOTELS AND RESIDENCES** is now open in **Manhattan, New York City**. The 114-room hotel from the Starwood group is designed in keeping with the elegance and perfection associated with the legendary French crystal maker, House of Baccarat. The hotel has all the trappings for an indulgent holiday with a price tag to match (www.baccarathotels.com; from \$ 879 a night [₹ 54,750 approx]).

The wraps are finally off the **WORLD'S FIRST HOTEL PRIVATE JET**, with **Four Seasons** promising to deliver the full fancy hotel at an altitude of 30,000 feet. The Boeing 757 has been kitted out with 52 flatbed seats in handcrafted leather, with hand-woven woollen carpets and



classy tableware, and comes complete with a Four Seasons-trained cabin crew, including an executive chef, sous chef, concierge and guest services manager. The first trip is slated for 2016. The cost, approx ₹ 4.2 lakh per person, includes stops – with accommodation at Four Seasons hotels – in LA, Hawaii, Bora Bora, Bali, Sydney, northern Thailand, Mumbai and Istanbul.

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Travel News



PACKAGES

1 **THE CLARIDGES, NEW DELHI**, is offering a two-night/ three-day package for ₹14,999 for the Deluxe Room, which gives you credit of ₹7,500 to be used on any services at the hotel during your stay. There's also a similar package for the Claridges Room for ₹16,999, which offers you credit of ₹8,500. These offers are valid until August 2015 (www.claridges.com).

2 If you're heading to **Dubai** this month, check out **AQUAVENTURE WATERPARK**'s special packages valid only until July 15, 2015. Pick from the Taste of Summer package, which gives you a free meal upon booking a ticket to Aquaventure Waterpark online, or the Summer Discovery package that gives you not just a free meal but also admission to the Lost Chambers Aquarium. Or go big with the Ultimate Summer Experience, which lets you meet the resident dolphins and sea lions, gives you same-day admission to Aquaventure Waterpark, a free meal and entry to the Lost Chambers Aquarium (www.atlantisthepalm.com/special-offers/wow-summer).

3 If you've watched *Dil Dhadakne Do*, chances are you're dreaming of cruising through sapphire seas and roaming tiny streets redolent with the smell of Turkish kebabs. The peeps at **AZAMARA CLUB CRUISES** probably read your mind when they designed the seven-night Greek Isles and Turkey Voyage. The Azamara Journey sets sail on July 30, 2015 and will hit Athens, Santorini, Mykonos – Delos, Patmos, Kusadasi – Ephesus and Istanbul. Starting from ₹95,800/ person on double occupancy basis, the package includes select standard spirits, international beers, wines and non-alcoholic beverages, laundry, shuttle service from port where available, and more (www.azamaroclubcruises.com).

4 Here's exciting news if you read about our sinful staycation at **PALLADIUM HOTEL, Mumbai** (*EasyTrips*, May 2015), and were tempted to go: the hotel has slashed the rates of its indulgent staycation packages by 50 per cent, which means you can get all the perks of the package at half the cost. The all-inclusive packages are now ₹13,000 for the Deluxe Room and ₹16,000 for the Club Room. The discount is available only till August 31, 2015. So, if you have a special occasion, you know where to head; if not, make one up! (www.palladiumhotel.in)

5 The iconic *Beauty and the Beast* comes to **THE VENETIAN MACAO** from July 13 to 26, 2015 and, to celebrate this Disney extravaganza, the hotel has introduced a power-packed offer starting from ₹18,100. The Beauty and the Beast Macao package gives you stay for two in the Royale Suite, breakfast and two tickets to the show. And, if you stay for two nights, you even get MOP 300 (₹ 2,400 approx) as shopping and dining dollars. Stay for three nights and you get that and a free upgrade to a Royale Suite with a Cotai Strip view. The offer is valid till July 26, 2015 (www.en.sandsresortsmacao.com/the-venetian-macao.html).

BOOK NOW!



BOOK NOW!



BOOK NOW!

'APPY DAYS

A new audio cultural tour, voiced by internationally renowned DJ Mary Anne Hobbs, has been added to the **MANCHESTER WALKING TOURS** app. It uses GPS to trigger location-based content, which means that you don't need to look down at your screen as you walk along the city's key cultural hotspots and neighbourhoods, starting in the Northern Quarter and ending at the recently reopened Whitworth Art Gallery, stopping at pause points along the way (*from iTunes; free*).



BOOK NOW!

The world comes to Goa - on a plate

At **A REVERIE** in **Calangute**, Aakritee and Virendra Sinh's Tasting Menu features 12 Goa-inspired dishes showcasing local ingredients in cooking techniques from around the world. Expect obscure ingredients, daring marriages of flavours and textures, and distinctive elements like edible Goan beach sand and the local breadseller's cycle. Coming to you in September... (00-91-9823174927, 00-91-9823505550; www.areverie.com; *Holiday St, Gauravaddo, Calangute*).



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July 2015

Why sharks need friends, too

Expert: Tom Hall



‘VE been hearing a lot about shark-diving adventures across the world and am considering experiencing one. Any pros and cons to help me decide?

—Anand Mahesh, New Delhi

Sharks have been in the news a lot recently – not so much for a spate of attacks on humans, as for the threat that the sharks themselves are facing. Demand, principally in Asia, for the delicacy shark-fin soup has resulted in up to 73 million sharks per year having their fins cut off, most with their bodies discarded at sea. The EU recently banned the practice within its waters. Marine biologist and TV presenter Monty Hall suggests that positive PR for sharks will only come if more of us find ways to meet them up close. “I’m a big advocate of shark diving,” he says. “In Gansbaai, South Africa, it’s estimated to be worth more than ZAR 53,918,675 (about ₹27,92,50,839) a year to the local community. As a result, this troubled species is zealously protected there.” Ali Hood, Director of Conservation for charity The Shark Trust (sharktrust.org), offers the following advice: “Ecotourism can provide an incentive to maintain healthy populations of sharks and rays. We would encourage travellers to research operators and select those who have undertaken a form of recognised wildlife-watching accreditation and are acknowledged for their careful practice. Any operators who appear to be advertising activities that clearly disturb the sharks or rays, such as touching, should be avoided.”



Tom Hall is Lonely Planet’s UK-based web editor. Follow his tweets [@tomhaltravel](https://twitter.com/tomhaltravel).



Top five eco-friendly destinations to swim with sharks

SCOTLAND: Basking Shark Scotland runs day- to week-long boat tours in the summer to see and swim with the giants (www.baskingsharkscotland.co.uk; day-trip from about ₹13,000).



SOUTH AFRICA: Founded by a marine conservationist, Dyer Island Cruises runs cage diving trips, with researchers, at Gansbaai (www.whalewatchsa.com; from ₹5,100).



GALÁPAGOS: Encounter reef sharks, sea lions, seals and dolphins while snorkelling or kayaking on an Ecoventura cruise (www.ecoventura.com; from ₹2,56,000 for a seven-night/ eight-day cruise).



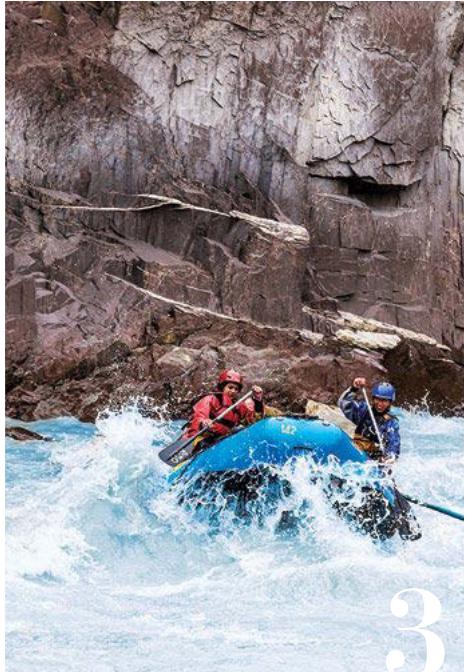
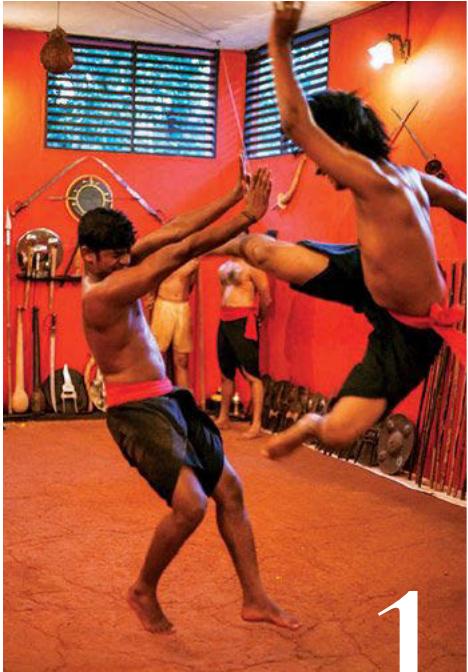
BELIZE: Charity Earthwatch runs trips to monitor reefs and collect data on species such as nurse and Caribbean reef sharks (www.earthwatch.org; from ₹1,63,000).



FJII: Pro-conservation Beqa Adventure Divers runs dives in a marine reserve where large bull and tiger sharks are found (www.fijisharkdive.com; from ₹6,750).



Easy Trips *you can do now*



inside

1. KOZHIKODE, Kerala

Learn the art of mimicking an elephant or a boar and come away a warrior

2. NEW DELHI, NCR

Fancy living in a grand old English mansion? Do it in style at The Imperial

3. ZANSKAR, Jammu & Kashmir

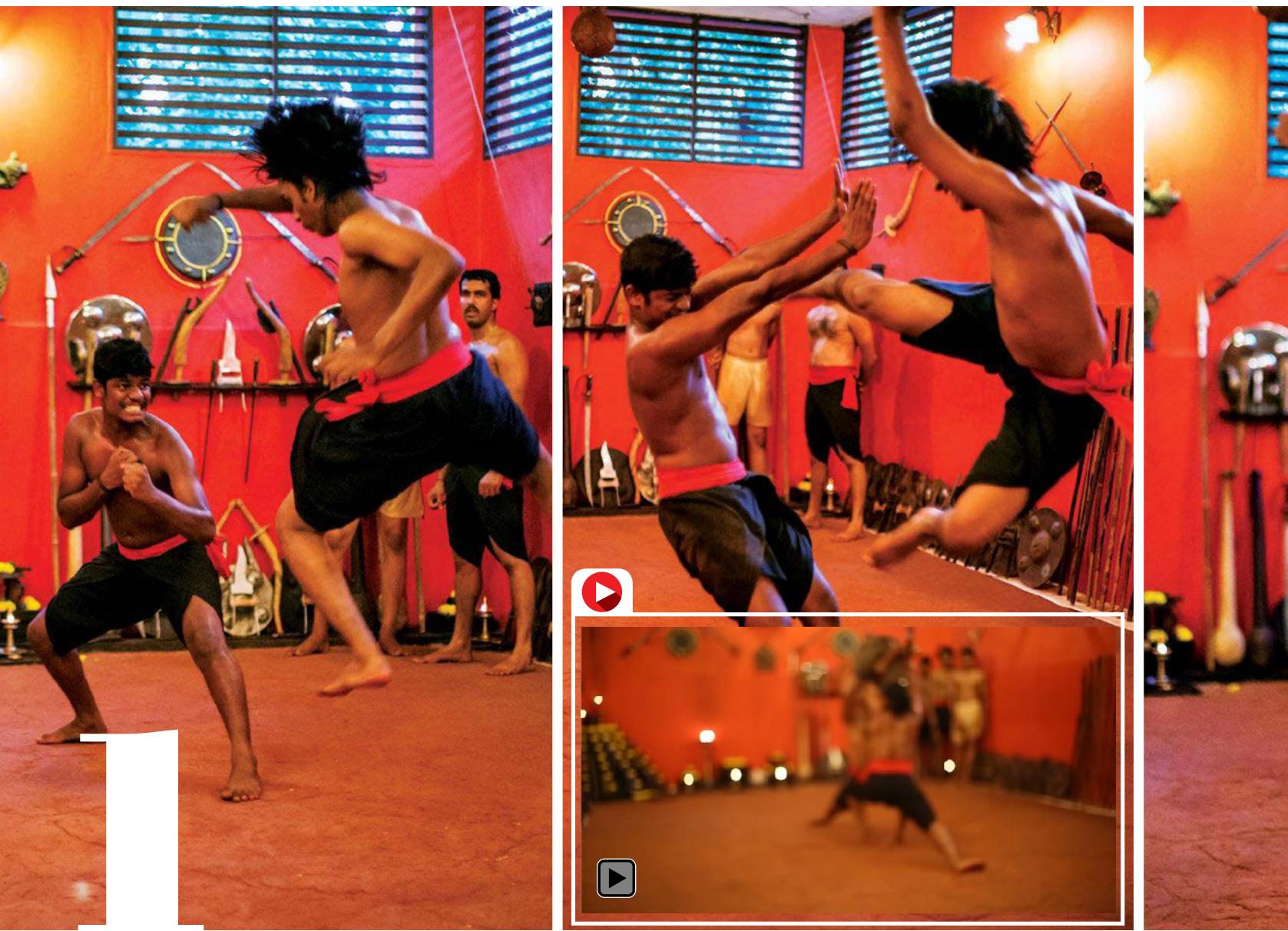
Go rafting down the wild and wonderful Zanskar River

4. GOA

Our pick of delightful monsoon stays (and offers) across the sunshine state

5. JAIPUR, Rajasthan

Watch skillful hands craft *minakari* jewellery and block-print sheets and try to make one yourself too!



Learning kalaripayattu in Kozhikode, Kerala

FIGHTING FIT

It isn't often that you can get away with mimicking an elephant or wild boar in adulthood and still emerge a stronger person. Unless, of course, you're in Kozhikode trying to learn *kalaripayattu*, an ancient martial art.

Kozhikode is a historically significant port city on Kerala's Malabar Coast. It brims with folk tradition (the ritual temple dance of *theyyam*), food (delicious Moplah cuisine) and culture, including one of the world's oldest martial arts. *Kalaripayattu* takes its name from *kalari*, the mud-floored gymnasium in which it is practised, and *payattu*, which means fight or exercise in Malayalam. Legend

has it that Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk, travelled to China, preached at a Shaolin temple and taught the once-listless monks about the 18 hands of Buddha derived from the 18 *adavukal*, or techniques, of *kalaripayattu*.

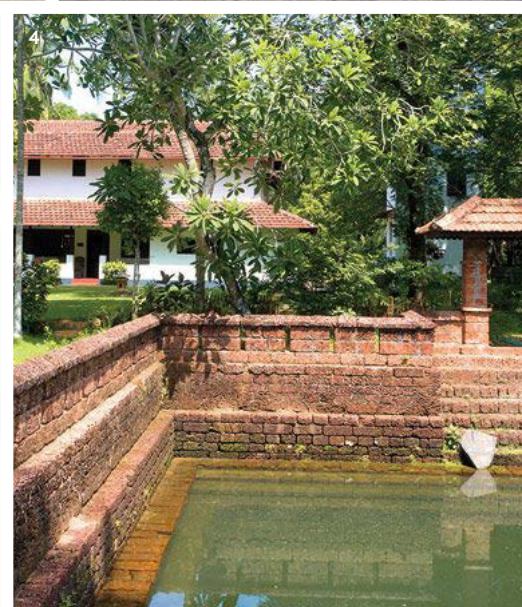
You can learn it, too, at [CVN Kalari Nadakkav](http://cvnkalari.com) where you will master postures derived from animals and birds as part of the introductory course. This art form is practised in both the northern and southern parts of Kerala, but the northern style puts more emphasis on *meippayattu*, or body control exercises, as opposed to the southern style (00-91-495-2769 114; cvnkalari.com, sunilkalari@yahoo.com; Nadakkavu; ₹2,000/ person/ four lessons).

Above: Advanced *kalaripayattu* students demonstrate a routine

The two-day workshop includes morning and evening sessions at which you will learn the kicks, leaps, jumps and stances that are the foundation of this martial art and which will help you build the strength, stamina, flexibility and balance required to advance your training, should you choose to pursue it. The subsequent stages are *kolthari* and *ankathari*, which involve training to fight with wooden sticks and metal weaponry.

While you probably won't get that far, don't be fooled into thinking that the sequence of stances you're learning is mere dance choreography. Each swoop and lunge is deceptively fierce, designed for attack and defence.

Learn a New Skill



GREAT FROM Kochi, Bangalore

GREAT FOR Fitness fiends

GO NOW

While the monsoon provides some respite from the heat.

After the morning class, you *will* be famished. Head down to the **Bombay Hotel** for the best breakfast in town; you can mop up fish and chicken in luscious tomato-based curries with the aptly-named nice *pathiri* (paper-thin

rice pancakes), followed by a *biryani chai*, a fancy-looking layered concoction of milk, spiced tea and foam (see *Where to Eat*).

Return to the session and prepare yourself for an ayurvedic massage, which, wonderfully, is part of your training. *Kalaripayattu* trains you to activate your *marma* (vital energy points), and *marma chikitsa* is the term for healing the various energy points. Before hospitals existed, *kalari* practitioners had to treat injuries themselves. This certainly bodes well for new students who can book a full-body oil massage (₹1,000/one hour), which increases flexibility, eases soreness, and treats any muscle trauma that might have occurred

1. Ayush Ayurveda Ashram provides comfortable accommodation in a modern villa

2. Sunset brings throngs of locals to Kozhikode Beach

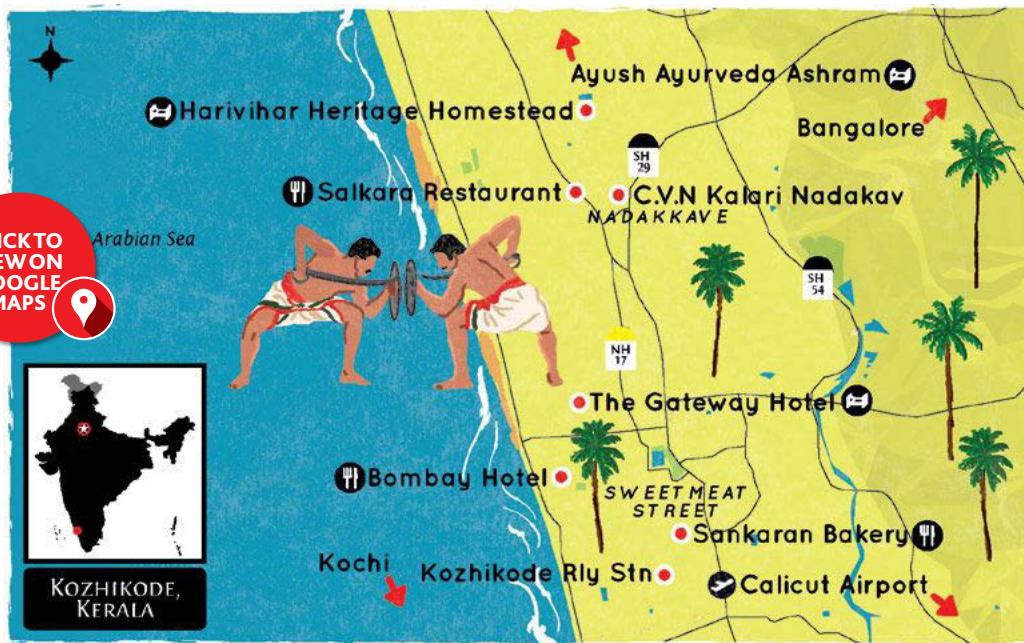
3. Enjoy tasty local breakfasts at Harivihar

4. Dip your toes into the natural bathing pond at Harivihar

during training. It's not often you can get a massage with the excuse that it will make you a more skilled practitioner, so do book one.

Of course, 48 hours isn't enough to master *kalaripayattu*, which is said to require a minimum of eight years of training under the guidance of a *guru*. But the taster course is a brilliant way to experience this indigenous art form, and will send you home with a travel souvenir you'll feel in your quivering abs, arms and thighs for days to come.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS JYOTHY KARAT



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (350km)

Closest city: Kochi (180km)

Closest airport: Calicut International Airport (30km), located in Karipur, is connected to most Indian metros. Air India, Jet Airways and SpiceJet fly to Kozhikode from Bangalore (return fares from ₹3,500).

Closest railhead: Kozhikode Railway Station (4km; CLT). Take the 16527 Yesvantpur-Cannanore Express (leaves Yesvantpur Junction

[YPR] 8pm, arrives CLT 7.25am; ₹ 875 Third AC) and return by the 16528 Yesvantpur Express (leaves CLT 7.35pm, arrives YPR 8am; ₹ 875 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

Auto rickshaws are available locally and run by the meter (starting fare from ₹ 20). The most convenient option, however, is to have your own transport. We used and liked the services of Travel Cart India (00-91-484-2663533/ 44/ 55; www.travelcartindia.com, mail@travelcartindia.com; from ₹ 2,900/ day for an AC Indigo [200km/ day]).

WHERE TO STAY

Ayush Ayurveda Ashram:

An accommodation option offered by the CVN Kalari Nadakav itself, this *ashram* has six well-appointed guest rooms and two treatment rooms (00-91-9349444805; cvnkalari.com/ayush.php, sunilkalari@yahoo.com; No 12/ 56C, near Government LP School, PO Eranikulam, Kozhikode; ₹ 2,000 for an AC room, ₹ 1,500 for a non-AC room). It also offers vegetarian meals (₹ 350/ person for breakfast, lunch and dinner).

The Gateway Hotel: Rooms span the gamut from basic to upscale suites at this Taj property, a smart retreat that houses an ayurvedic hospital with all the mod cons. It serves creative cuisine based on an ayurvedic diet and boasts a luxurious pool (00-91-495-6613000; thegatewayhotels.com, gateway@tajhotels.com; PT Usha Rd; from ₹ 5,700 with breakfast).

Harivihar Heritage Homestead:

The focus is on ayurveda and yoga at this boutique hotel set on a stunning property with a traditional bathing pond. This royal ancestral home is 170 years old and filled with antiques. Along with treatment facilities, all meals provided are vegetarian and based on ayurvedic principles (00-91-495-2765865; www.harivihar.com, admin@harivihar.com; Bilathikulam; from ₹ 7,500 with all meals, ayurveda and yoga packages from ₹ 13,500).

An ayurveda-approved stir fry on the special menu at The Gateway Hotel

WHERE TO EAT

Most restaurants open early and stay open late as well. Share a table with the locals at **Bombay Hotel** where, apart from breakfast, teatime is great too. The snacks cupboard brims with ghee-laden treats like *unnakaya* (coconut-stuffed plantain) and *chatti pathiri*, a sweet or savoury layered pastry (00-91-495-2366730; South Beach, Silk St; 6am – 12am; fish curry: ₹ 80,



pathiri: ₹ 5, biryani chai: ₹ 16). **Salkara Restaurant**, a no-frills joint that's good value for money, is a short stroll from the class. Try the mango curry with fish or prawns, lacy *appams*, and squid and mussels dry fry (00-91-495-2760062; salkara.com; Wayanad Rd, East Nadakkavu [second outlet: Kannur Rd, West Nadakkavu]; 7am – 11pm; mango curry from ₹ 150, squid dry fry: ₹ 130). Those with a sweet tooth shouldn't miss the popular **Sweetmeat (SM) Street** where the bakeries are filled with colourful, glistening slabs of *halva*, coconut-based treats and jars of biscuits. Try **Sankaran Bakery** (00-91-495-2720341; SM St; 8am – 8pm; halva from ₹ 120/ kg).

WHAT TO PACK

You'll be hot and sweaty from the class so pack lots of workout gear, an extra towel, a water bottle, and rain gear in case you want to venture out for meals. *Kalaripayattu* is practised barefoot so you don't need special footwear.

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Most restaurants in town have decent loos and handwashing facilities.

SHOPPING

Khadi Gramodyog Emporium

stocks wooden handicrafts, leather goods, cotton and silk saris, and spices (00-91-495-2721962; www.khadigramodyogemporium.com; SM St; 10am – 7.30pm; handicrafts from ₹ 50, spices from ₹ 20).

SAFETY

Kozhikode is safe, but dress conservatively, and stick to well-lit paths at night.

MEDICAL AID

MIMS Hospital is well-equipped to handle emergencies (00-91-495-3911400; www.mimsindia.com; Mini Bypass Rd, Govindapuram).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

The ideal age for *kalaripayattu* training is seven years; kids are encouraged to sign up for the workshop.

GOOD TO KNOW

* Though a good level of fitness helps, the centre can accommodate people at all levels of fitness.

* Each lesson is about 90 minutes long.

* CVN Kalari Nadav also offers classes at another location outside the city in a more rural setting, with a dug-out *kalari*.



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The Imperial, New Delhi, NCR

TIME TRAVEL

Picture yourself in a period drama – *Downton Abbey* if you like. Imagine there's a weekend party, and everyone's gathered in a grand mansion that's been spiffed up for the occasion. It's the event of the season, and you've been anticipating it for ages. Your mouth's watering at the thought of all the feasting to come; all the pampering that's part of the do, and the chance to shine in your Sunday best. Sounds like a great escape, doesn't it?

If you're Delhi-based, this escape is as easy as checking yourself into The Imperial (*all details in Fact File*) in the heart of Central New Delhi, which was built as part of Lutyens's plan for the capital.

As you head down the driveway off Janpath, past the royal palms that have been here since the hotel's opening in 1936, you see the white Colonial structure beckoning. As you're escorted out of your car, you're instantly enveloped in the understated luxury that The Imperial exudes. The marble floors are polished to a shine, and your eyes wander, distracted by the artwork, as you're shown to your room for the next few days.

There's a whole lot of it to be distracted by, for the walls boast a wealth of artwork, as befitting any English mansion worth its salt. But, as your guide tells you, there's time for that

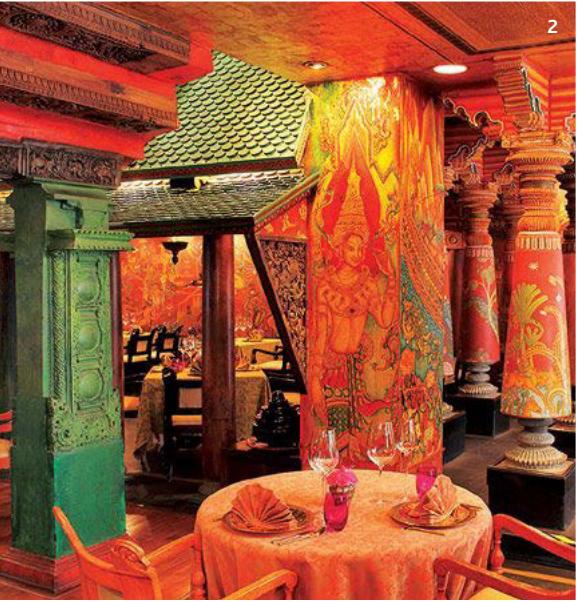
Above: The Royal Imperial Suite perfectly showcases the architectural influences of the hotel

Below & 2 (facing page): The walls of The Spice Route are lined with murals and works of art

later. First, savour your spacious room for a bit, maybe squeeze in a soak in the bath before heading down for lunch. Pick from an oriental feast in *The Spice Route*, or a lighter repast off the international buffet at the *1911 Restaurant*.

After sating your tummy, it's finally time to take in all that art. The hotel takes pride in its collection of period art, and it's best explored through a guided *Art Tour*, which concludes with a high tea (₹2,500, ₹1,500 *without high tea*). You'll be taken through the hotel, and you must try not to look like a gauche plebeian and gape as you're shown the architectural details – a delightful mix of Colonial and Art Deco influences – and the artworks





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New Delhi

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PHOTOGRAPHS: KRISHNA ANGIRA (MAIN, 1 & 3)

that line the walls. The art is categorised by period, and the corridors are themed – here you find paintings of the Himalayas, there, depictions of Indian religions. You make mental notes to return to the galleries, as there's just so much to see, and the hours have flown by.

Now, it's time to head to the spa for some pampering. There's a range of treatments to choose from (*included in the Summer Wellness Spa Retreat package*), and you've got a dinner reservation to keep. The award-winning **San Gimignano** hosts the crème of Delhi society. It's a meal you'll remember, quite unlike the Italian fare available elsewhere. Signature dishes include a sinful parmesan soup with white truffle oil, homemade pappardelle pasta with melt-in-the-mouth slow-cooked lamb, and a life-changing Chilean sea bass in white wine with capers, cherry tomatoes and kalamata olives. Full to bursting but not wanting to retire just yet, you head to the very British

1. The private Hardinge Room attached to the 1911 Bar has the only Victoria Cross in the city

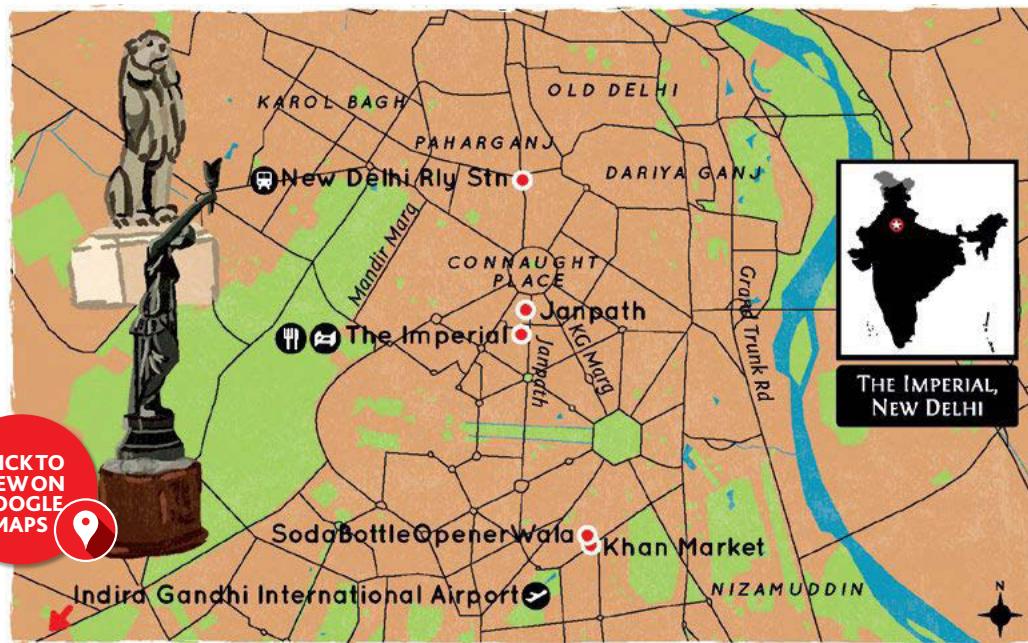
3. The Chilean sea bass at San Gimignano alone is worth visiting The Imperial for

4. The ornate entrance to the spa sets the tone for what lies ahead

1911 Bar, named for the year in which the capital was shifted from Kolkata. Ask if you can check out the collection of military gallantry awards in the private room – before settling down at the bar with your poison of choice.

Tempting as it is to sleep in the next morning, a yoga session awaits, followed by a buffet breakfast at 1911 Restaurant, considered to be one of the best spreads in the city (*both included in the package*). It'll soon be time to return to the real world – you'll be returning lighter in the pocket, but, for a bit at least, you'll have had a taste of the good life.

WORDS RADHIKA LALLA



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VIEW ON
GOOGLE
MAPS

GETTING AROUND

The Imperial will organise car transfers from the airport (see *Where to Stay*; SUV: ₹3,500, Mercedes S Class: ₹7,000). You can drive

from your residence to the hotel, or use any of the variety of radio taxis available in New Delhi. The **Janpath Metro Stop (Violet Line)** is close to the hotel, too.

WHERE TO STAY

The Imperial: The Summer Wellness Spa Retreat for two (valid till September 15, 2015) includes a night in a Heritage Room, an early check-in at 10am and late check-out (till 4pm), a welcome fruit platter on arrival, the buffet breakfast at 1911 Restaurant, a choice of either the Imperial Balance Massage, Ayurveda Abhyanga Massage, Signature Facial Kriya or Balinese massage for two (60 minutes), Aroma steam (30 minutes), Finnish sauna and Hydrotherapy for two, and a 30-minute yoga or meditation breathing session on request for two, and a choice of either one manicure, pedicure, hair conditioning ritual or scalp massage for 30 minutes for two (00-91-11-41116303; theimperialindia.com, reservation@theimperialindia.com; Janpath Lane, Connaught Place; Summer Wellness Spa Retreat: ₹14,999/night for a maximum of two nights).

WHERE TO EAT

San Gimignano is rated as one of the best restaurants in the country, and offers Tuscan-style Italian food (00-91-11-41116634; lunch: 12.30pm – 2.45pm, dinner: 7pm – 11.45pm; mains from ₹1,125). The detailed murals on the walls of **The Spice Route** deserve an art tour

of their own; the menu covers food from Kerala to Sri Lanka, Thailand to Indonesia, and Vietnam and more (00-91-11-41116634; lunch: 12.30pm – 2.45pm, dinner: 7pm – 11.45pm; mains from ₹900). **Daniell's Tavern** is the in-house Indian restaurant, with colonial-era British favourites on the menu. It hosts *ghazal* performances most nights (00-91-11-41116634; 6.30pm – 11.45pm [dinner only], live music Wed – Mon; dal tadka: ₹800). **1911 Restaurant** has an all-day menu of eats from around the world, and is where the buffet breakfast is served. Don't miss the mural that runs along one wall, extending into the **1911 Bar** – it's an original from the time of construction (00-91-11-41116634; restaurant: lunch buffet: 12.30pm – 2.45pm; mains from ₹950; bar: 11.30am – 12.45am; cocktails from ₹850). By night, the indoor section of 1911 is transformed into **Nostalgia**, which serves old-school French food – think *coq au vin* and *crêpes Suzette* flambéed at your table and often has live music (00-91-11-41116602; 6.30pm – 11.45pm; *coq au vin*: ₹1,800). **Patiala Peg** is the smaller of the two bars here, and, true to its name, drinks are poured

You will find pieces of art at every turn in **The Imperial**

in 75ml measures, not the standard 60ml (00-91-11-41116634; 12.30pm – 11.45pm; cocktails from ₹850).

If you want to step out, make the 10-odd minute drive to Khan Market and restaurateur AD Singh's new venture, **SodaBottleOpenerWala**. Its kitschy interiors compete with Parsi and 'Bombay' food, which include a good *patra ni macchi* and a more-ish veg cutlet – *Aloo Aunty's Vegetable Cutlet* (00-91-11-33105055; 73, Khan Market; *Aloo Aunty's Vegetable Cutlet*: ₹185, *patra ni macchi* from ₹695, on availability as the fish is sourced from Mumbai).

WHAT TO PACK

 Carry light reading material if you must, a mix of comfortable and fancy togs, and swimmers if you plan to hit the pool. **San Gimignano**, **Daniell's Tavern**, **Nostalgia** and **The Spice Route** have a 'smart casual' dress code.

SHOPPING

 You'll find books, clothes, bath and wellness products at **The Imperial Book Shop** (9am – 10.30pm; *wellness products* from ₹300), as well as a Chanel showroom for some window-shopping next door. **The Imperial Boutique** stocks hotel merchandise, if you're so inclined (10am – 8pm). The **La Baguette** bakery offers edible treats (00-91-11-41116634; 10am – 10pm; *pastries* from ₹174).

MEDICAL AID

 The Imperial has a doctor on call; in case of a major medical emergency head to **Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital**, 4km away from The Imperial (00-91-11-23365525; rmlh.nic.in; Baba Kharak Singh Marg, near Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, Connaught Place).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * The swimming pool is open from 7am to 8pm in summer and till 7pm in winter.
- * Make appointments for all spa and salon treatments on arrival (00-91-11-41116210; spa: 8am – 10pm, salon: 8am – 9pm).
- * It's advisable to make reservations for all meals (restaurant reservations: 00-91-11-41116634).
- * A cover charge of ₹900 plus taxes applies at **The Atrium**, which is where the high tea is served (00-91-41116634; 8am – 11.30pm).





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3

Rafting on the Zanskar River, Jammu & Kashmir

WATER WONDERLAND

Roads can take you many places, but they can't make you float in heaven. Of all the ways to see Ladakh, rafting down its pristine glacial river has got to be the most thrilling. With a paddle in hand and your eyes on the sky, it's easy to feel like a heroic explorer coursing through a canyon reserved just for you.

White-water rafting on the Zanskar River makes for an invigorating weekend.

Rimo Expeditions offers a one-and-a-half-day rafting trip with camping (see *Getting Around*). Your jeep follows a winding, 56km-long mountain road from Leh to the aptly-named **Chilling Village**, from where you embark on a 30km course

that plunges through several Grade III and IV rapids. Under a fleecy blue sky, the river powers your raft onward for over three hours in the heart of the Himalayas.

Your instructor is both a guardian and an entertainer on this expedition. He barks orders over feisty, hissing, swirling waters and chatters garrulously on the calmer stretches, narrating tales of his own adventures (and misadventures) in these mountains. These calmer interludes don't last too long though. Soon, the rapids begin to hit, one after the

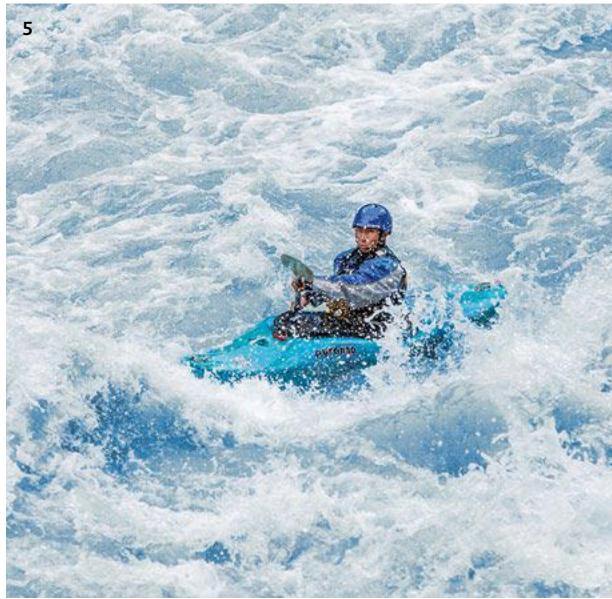
Above: Rafting on the mighty Zanskar River is an experience you won't soon forget

Below & 2 (facing page): Nimu Village's friendly residents harvest everything from cabbages to apricots



other, smacking hard against your face, as you balance on the edge of the raft, paddling with your heart in your mouth. When playful whirlpools catch hold of your raft and spin it round and round, you bounce away squealing. But don't worry, the raft is secure and enough safety measures are in place – a crew member shoots ahead in a kayak to test the waters before you get there.

The rafting trip ends near **Nimu Village** at the *sangam*, or confluence, of two rivers where the blue of the Zanskar sparkles beside the green Indus before merging into it. From here, a jeep takes you to a private campground at Nimu (see *Where to Stay*). As the guides



GREAT FROM

New Delhi, Chandigarh

GREAT FOR

Adventure and fabulous scenery

GO NOW

Mid-July to mid-August is great for pro rafting enthusiasts as the water levels are high, and mid-August to mid-September is good for beginners.

pitch tents and prepare dinner, you're free to wander into the idyllic village, where apples and apricots hang low from branches at every corner, and golden

patches of wheat fan out on either side. The path is broad at first, where you might even encounter the stray rider on a Royal Enfield cruising along, and then diverges into little footpaths, leading through tangled trees to mini waterfalls and Buddhist stupas.

Nimu is a great place to see classic Ladakhi architecture. Wooden window frames of homes look over gardens bursting with sunflowers, potatoes and cabbages. Children run with the cattle and blush shyly on being spoken to. It's no mystery why they all look so content – with plentiful food, tonnes of glacial streams tinkling towards the fields and snowy mountains on the horizon, you'd

1. A typical Ladakhi home bordered by sunflowers in Nimu Village

3. Apples hang temptingly low from trees around the campground in Nimu Village

4. If you're camping at Nimu, you'll probably wake up (wide-eyed) to this view outside your tent

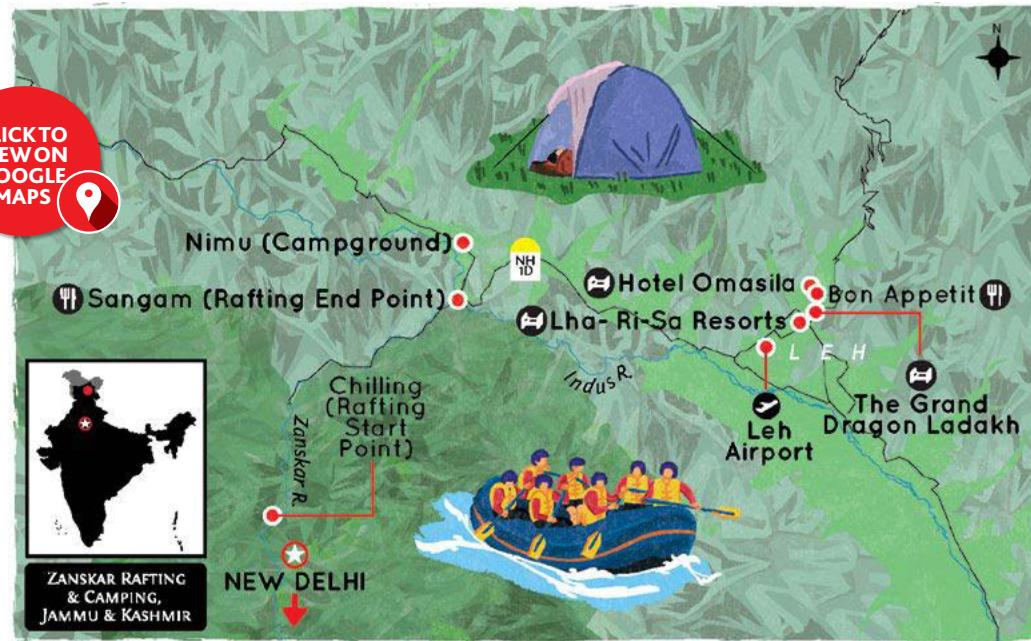
5. A guide scoots ahead to check if the rapids are safe for you

be a happy camper in this village too.

But you're only here for the weekend, so make your way back to your temporary home for a simple dinner that is all the more satisfying after a long day of tiring your limbs. Hot soup followed by a homely meal warms your insides and puts you in a restful mood. Play games around the campfire, or snuggle up in your tent with a book and a torch. Either way, sleep comes quickly and peacefully and before you know it, you'll be jumping out of your cosy bed for another walk in the mountains.

WORDS KRUTTIKA NADIG
PHOTOGRAPHS HASHIM BADANI

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: New Delhi (1,266km). One can drive up via either **Manali** (475km) or **Srinagar** (415km) with night halts on the way, so the journey will take two or three days.

Closest airport: Leh Airport (4km from Leh city centre) is connected to New Delhi by GoAir, JetKonnect and Air India (return fares from New Delhi are ₹ 15,648). It's advisable to book early for cheaper fares.

GETTING AROUND

You can take a taxi from Leh Airport to your hotel in Leh (from ₹ 300 to ₹ 500 one-way). We used and liked the services of **Rimo Expeditions** for car transport within Leh and to the starting point in Chilling and back to Leh as well as rafting and camping (booking office [Gurgaon] 00-91-124-2806027/28/29, 4051640, Leh office: 00-91-1982-253348/253257; www.rimoexpeditions.com, info@rimoexpeditions.com; ₹ 850/ one-way airport transfer, rafting trip: ₹ 2,500/ person [min group of four] with transport to and from the rafting point and lunch).

WHERE TO STAY

IN LEH:

Hotel Omasila: Set in a courtyard filled with flowers, this hotel offers warm and spacious rooms, some with views of the snow-capped mountains (00-91-1982-252119; www.hotelomasila.com; Changspa Rd; from ₹ 3,700 with breakfast and dinner).

Lha-Rhi-Sa Resorts: This is a good option for those who enjoy being close to nature, as you can live in your own treehouse sheltered by a poplar grove on the serene outskirts of town (00-91-1982-252000; www.ladakh-lharisa.com; Skara; from ₹ 8,200 with all meals).

The Grand Dragon Ladakh: One of Leh's most luxurious stay options, the rooms have splendid views of the Shanti Stupa and Leh Palace (00-91-1982-257786; www.thegranddragonladakh.com; Old Rd Sheynam, Leh; from ₹ 10,000 with breakfast).

IN NIMU:

Camping: The experience of camping in a Himalayan village is like no other. Rimo Expeditions offers basic two-person tents that you can either pitch yourself or let the guides do all the work while you go tramping through the fields. Be warned that the tents are small and will also serve as your changing room and luggage storage area (₹ 4,500/ person for two people with tent, mattress, sleeping bag, dinner, breakfast and transport back to Leh the following morning, the price drops if the number of people increases).

WHAT TO PACK

A light jacket, walking shoes, a cap, rubber shoes or sandals, torch, towel and spare batteries. If you wear glasses, make sure there are straps attached to them so that you don't lose them.

WHAT TO EAT

Bon Appetit serves chocolate momos; need we say more? This stylish café also does the best thin-crust pizzas and continental chicken in town (00-91-1982-251533; Lower Karzoo, Leh; 11am – 11pm; mains from ₹ 250). At the camp, the **Rimo Expeditions** crew will cook up a healthy vegetarian dinner and a hearty breakfast of eggs, fruit and parathas. After your rafting trip, you can warm up with a steaming bowl of instant noodles (₹ 40) and **chai** (₹ 20) at the **Splash Sangam** restaurant. This is a good meeting point for people to relax and share stories after rafting (8am – 4pm).

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

The drive from Chilling to Nimu takes about two hours, so it's best to use the loo at your hotel in Leh. There's an organic toilet (with a spade!) at the camp, but no shower facilities. Shower in the morning before you depart from Leh and then the next day when you return.

SAFETY

It's extremely important to rest completely for the first 24 hours in Leh so you can acclimatise, especially if arriving by air. Attempt rafting only once your body has acclimated. Lifejackets are provided and there's a safety briefing before you begin. It's not necessary to know how to swim. If you suffer from severe altitude sickness, make your way down to a lower altitude immediately.

MEDICAL AID

Sonam Norboo Memorial (SNM) Hospital, Leh, can take care of your medical needs (00-91-1982-252014; 24 X 7 emergency unit).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Outdoorsy kids can have a lot of fun on this trip. The minimum age for rafting is 16 years.

GOOD TO KNOW

* There's no changing room at the sangam, so you should stock your vehicle with blankets and towels to avoid catching a chill.

* Be prepared for unpredictable weather as the daytime temperatures in Ladakh can go up to 35°C and can feel warmer due to the intensity of the sun, but, if it gets cloudy, the temperatures drop immediately.

SOMETIMES,
A CAMERA ONLY COMES
IN THE WAY.



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4



Goa in the rains

OLD IS GOLD

Goa in the monsoon is tailor-made for classic experiences. There are empty beaches to stroll along, rain-soaked heritage sites to gawk at and a little R&R sans the crowds. What perfectly complements this rainy getaway is the fact that Goa is home to beautiful Portuguese-style villas and B&Bs, which come with a lot of history, quiet corners and friendly staff.

One such is [Turiya Villa and Spa](#) in a tranquil corner in Canacona in South Goa (see *Where to Stay for all details*). Built over a hundred years ago, the house has retained the old-Goan style with rooms opening out on to an airy patio,

period furniture and private bathrooms located at the back of the house. If you want to venture out, [Palolem Beach](#) (3km) is a 10-minute drive away.

Another lovely, painstakingly-restored villa to check into is [Arco Iris](#) in Curtorim, South Goa. Take a cue from its owners, who moved from Bangalore to escape the cacophony of city life, and enter a world of calm and quiet. The 200-year-old house is located on a 1.5-acre property surrounded by greenery and overlooking a seasonal lake. Each of the five rooms is decorated in a colour of the rainbow and filled with antique furniture and hand-painted

Above: The pretty courtyard of Arco Iris is great for a romantic dinner à deux

Below: Vintage decor and furniture add to the charm of *Hospedaria Abrigo de Botelho*

Goan tiles, or *azulejos*. The Goan-style *balcão* (porch), and balcony that run along the front of the house and the back courtyard are perfect places to laze about on. If you want to stretch your legs a little, head out on a trek (₹1,500 with a naturalist), go bird-watching (guide: ₹500) or on a boat ride on Zuari River (₹1,500/ boat/ two hours, weather permitting). Nearby in Chandor Village is the magnificent [Braganza House](#).

Take a look around; the West Wing is brimming with period furniture, crystal chandeliers and treasures from around the world. The grand house is said to date back to the 17th century with the main facade featuring 28 balconies overlooking



Great Monsoon Offers!



GREAT FROM

Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune

GREAT FOR

Exploring old Goan villas

GO NOW

To enjoy monsoon discounts.

the village square (9.30am–5pm; free but a donation of ₹100 to ₹150 is appreciated).

If you prefer Panjim as your base,

Hospedaria Abrigo de Botelho

is a lovely little stay. This 150-year-old guesthouse is tucked into a quiet corner of the Latin district of **Fontainhas**.

The spacious rooms open out onto private balconies. Take advantage of the fact that you're in the lap of Goa's historic Latin district and explore a little. Fontainhas and **Sao Tomé** are full of charming Portuguese villas and buildings – it's incredible just how much history these areas hold. Stroll the tiny alleyways that meander between ancient houses, and visit the impressive **Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Church**.

If North Goa is where your heart is, make **Quinta da Graça** your home. Dating back to the 1940s, this charming B&B in **Saligao Village** has six rooms that come with individual entrances at the back – perfect for those looking for privacy.



1. When you're rained in, **Capella**'s cosy nooks are perfect for quiet moments

2. Start your day with a simple but yummy home-made breakfast at **Quinta da Graça**

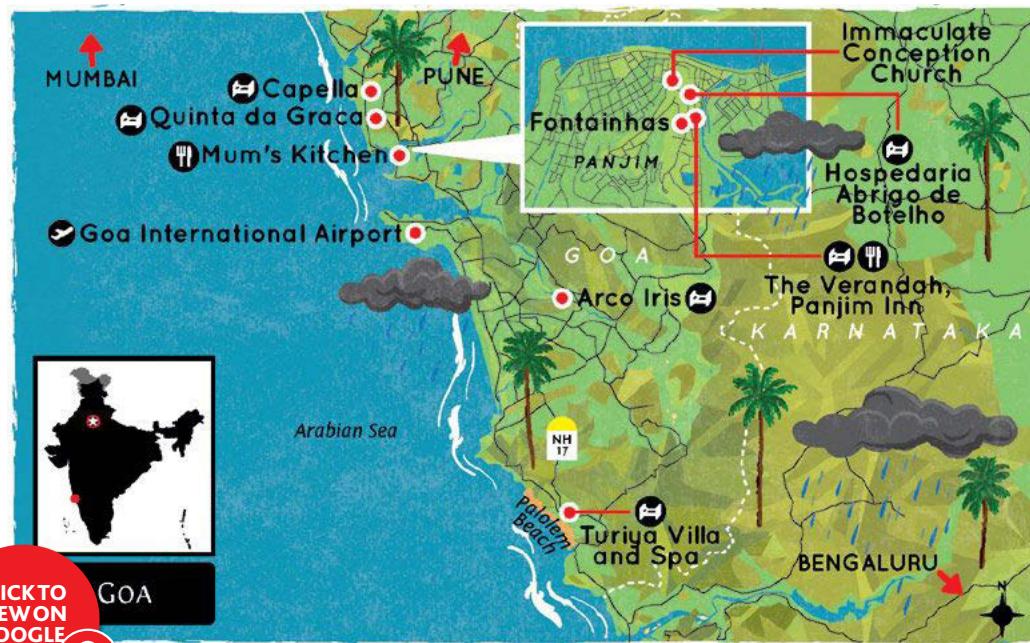
3. See Goa's beaches like you've never seen them: **Palolem's** near-empty beach is barely 10 minutes away from **Turiya Villa and Spa**

Another wonderful stay in sleepy Parra Village in North Goa is the boutique homestay **Capella**, a short distance from Bagã Beach. Located on a privately-owned hill, the property is surrounded by lush greenery, especially in the monsoon. The house itself is beautiful, with an infinity pool and high-ceilinged living room, opening out onto a courtyard, and three pretty rooms. Take a refreshing dip in the pool or grab a book, plonk yourself in the courtyard filled with plants and a fishpond and let the rhythmic pitter-patter lull you into a state of bliss.

WORDS NADEZNA SIGANPORIA

PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



CLICK TO
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MAPS

FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Mumbai (590km)

Closest airport: Goa International Airport (25km from Panjim). SpiceJet, IndiGo, GoAir, Air India, JetKonnect and Jet Airways fly direct from Mumbai (return fares from ₹ 4,300).

Closest railhead: Thivim Railway Station (THVM; 24km from Panjim). Take the daily 10111 Konkan Kanya Express (leaves Mumbai CST [CSTM] 11.05pm, arrives THVM 10.41am;

₹ 1,000 Third AC) and return by the daily 10112 Konkan Kanya Express (leaves THVM 5.36pm, arrives CSTM 5.50am; ₹ 1,000 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

The best option is to hire a car to travel around; hotels can arrange for taxis (airport transfers: from ₹ 1,000 and railway station transfers from ₹ 500). Or try Vailankanni Auto Hires (00-91-832-2489568; www.goacars.in; from ₹ 1,500/ eight hours/ 80km for an AC Indica).

WHERE TO STAY

Turiya Villa and Spa

00-91-832-2644172; www.turiyahotels.com, info@turiyahotels.com; H No 16, Chaudi, near Canacona Bus Stand, Canacona; from ₹ 3,500 with breakfast and taxes, monsoon packages from ₹ 6,666 for two nights/ three days, from ₹ 8,888 for three nights/ four days; lunch/ dinner: ₹ 500/ veg thali, ₹ 750/ non-veg thali

Arco Iris: 00-91-832-2786800, 00-91-9604964482; arco-iris. www.neemranahotels.com, sales@neemranahotels.com; No 1384, Sinai Bagh, near Carmel Chapel & High School, Curtorim; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast, lunch/ dinner: ₹ 600/ person

Hospedaria Abrigo de Botelho:

00-91-9527778884; www.hadbgoa.com, reservations@hadbgoa.com; Rua de Natal, Fontainhas, Panjim; from ₹ 2,100 with breakfast

Quinta da Graça: 00-91-832-2278659; www.quintadagracagoa.com, savio@quintadagracagoa.com; 8/ 6 A, Casa Araujo, Abreu Vaddo, Saligao, Bardez; from ₹ 2,300 with breakfast

Capella: 00-91-9923459488; www.capellagoa.com, info@capellagoa.com; 376/ 1, Boquenchi Arrady, Parra, Bardez; from ₹ 5,000 with breakfast, lunch/ dinner: ₹ 350/ veg, from ₹ 450/ non-veg

WHAT TO EAT

A local favourite, **Hospedaria Venite** is located in an old Portuguese house and is known as much for its yummy continental and local offerings as for its quirky atmosphere (00-91-832-2425537; 31st January Rd, Panjim; 9am – 10.30pm Mon – Sat; mains from ₹ 390). For great Goan cuisine, head to **The Verandah Restaurant**, at the charming Panjim Inn,



which also serves a few North Indian, continental and Chinese dishes (00-91-832-2221122; panjiminn.com; E-212, 31st January Rd, Panjim; 11am – 10pm; mains from ₹ 360). With a charming little garden to look out on, **Mum's Kitchen** is a wonderful restaurant to visit during the rains. Its local delights like prawn peri peri, pork vindaloo and mouth-watering bebinca, a traditional layered dessert made with coconut milk, eggs and flour, are must-tries (00-91-9822175556; mumskitchengoa.com; 854, Martins Building, Dayanand Bandodkar St, Panjim-Miramar Rd; 11am – 11pm; mains from ₹ 750).

SHOPPING

At Saudades, you'll find period furniture and decor of every size and shape sourced from around the country (00-91-832-2409873; H No 83, Chogm Rd, opp Mae de Deus Chapel, Sangolda; 9am – 7pm; antique artefacts from ₹ 700). **Velha Goa Galeria** is the place for Goan hand-painted tiles, cut-glass artefacts and ceramics (00-91-832-2426628; www.velhagoa.com; 4/ 191, Rua de Ourem, Fontainhas, Panjim; 9am – 1pm, 3pm – 7pm Mon – Sat; tiles from ₹ 390).

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Dabolim Airport, Palolem Beach, and all restaurants have decent loos.

MEDICAL AID

All properties have a basic first-aid kit and doctor on call. Visit **Vrundavan Shalby Hospital** for emergencies (00-91-832-6713535; vrundavanshalby.com; NH 17 A, By-pass Karaswada, Mapusa).

CHILD FRIENDLINESS

Both B&Bs, Hospedaria Abrigo de Botelho and Quinta da Graça don't have much to offer kids; Capella has a pool, and Arco Iris has a collection of books to choose from. Turiya Villa & Spa works better as a romantic getaway.

GOOD TO KNOW

Monsoon offers typically end in September and high-season rates kick in from October. Don't rely completely on Google maps for locations of the homestays, since some are incorrectly marked; call the properties for directions.

3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK.
A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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MAGAZINE INDIA

5



Crafting in Jaipur, Rajasthan

ARTY AFTERNOONS

If you had to sum up Jaipur in one line, you'd have to squeeze all its colourful arts and crafts in with the legion of forts. Its tiny lanes lead to artisans' dens where unique jewellery, fabrics and paintings are crafted right before your eyes. What's more, you can also try your hand at making one of these yourself.

Drop into **Paliwal Textiles** where practised hands block-print rows of Rajasthani motifs on cotton sheets. Each motif's outline comes from a master block – a piece of wood with an embossed design that is then dipped in vegetable dye. The details of these motifs are filled in using smaller blocks inked in various hues.

The younger Mr Paliwal will show you his collection of antique block-printed bridal garments, and giant rugs on which jail inmates printed a local version of Ludo to keep themselves amused (true story!). Try your hand at block-printing a camel or an elephant and watch the natural dyes change colour upon drying. But aligning the blocks is tricky business: one slip of the hand and you end up with a two-headed animal instead of one (00-91-141-2670650; Mount Rd, opp Ramgarh Rd; ₹300/ person/ 30-minute demo).

If you think that's hard, the need for accuracy is heightened while creating Rajasthani miniature paintings. At **Shashi Arts & Crafts**, resident artist Raja Babu

Above: A prized collection of *minakari rani haar* necklaces at Deen Dayal Raj Kumar Jewellers

Below: Pretty marble artefacts line the shelves at Shashi Arts & Crafts

paints marble plates and parchment-like paper using light strokes in a studio crammed with miniatures depicting Rajput *havelis* and Mughal court scenes. Local artists use techniques developed in the Kota, Bundi, Kishengarh and Jaipur schools of miniature painting. In fact, the shape of the nose, ears and other features depends on the school of painting. *Bani-thani*, which depicts side-profiles of bejewelled women, is the most commonly-used style. Give it a go – it's quite fun (00-91-141-2314889; 2412, Moorti Mohalla, 3rd Crossing, Khazana Walon ka Rasta, Chand Pole Bazaar; from ₹1,750/ person/ half-day demo).

Amble a few lanes away to **Johni**





GREAT FROM

New Delhi

GREAT FOR

Picking up local crafts and some skills

GO NOW

As the rain keeps the weather cool.

Bazaar to find the affable Deepak Sankit, who also dabbles in paint at his home studio. But he works on something a little more valuable than cloth. Learn the art of making enamel jewellery at **Deen Dayal Raj Kumar Jewellers**. Enamelling is a demanding but fun activity in which

glass paints are fused into precious metals. Deepak's one-day crash course is a peek into the intricate artistry behind *kundan-minakari*, Jaipur's trademark craft that combines Persian *minakari* (enamelling) with gold or silver (00-91-141-2578741; ddrenamel.com; 360, Gali Meniyani, Gopal Ji ka Rasta; from ₹ 2,190/ person/ half-day workshop). For novices, he recommends the *sgraffito* (scratching) technique. *Cloisonné* is a slightly tougher technique in which you tweeze silver wire into a chosen shape, glue it to the plate, and fill it in with many colours of enamel, which is obtained by crushing blocks of glass mixed with metal oxide in a pestle. He bakes the plates in a tiny oven before

1. Cloisonné pendant-making in progress at Deen Dayal Raj Kumar Jewellers

2. At Paliwal Textiles, you can block-print a hanky of your own

3. The colours in minakari are obtained by crushing glass

4. Romance is a popular theme in local miniature paintings

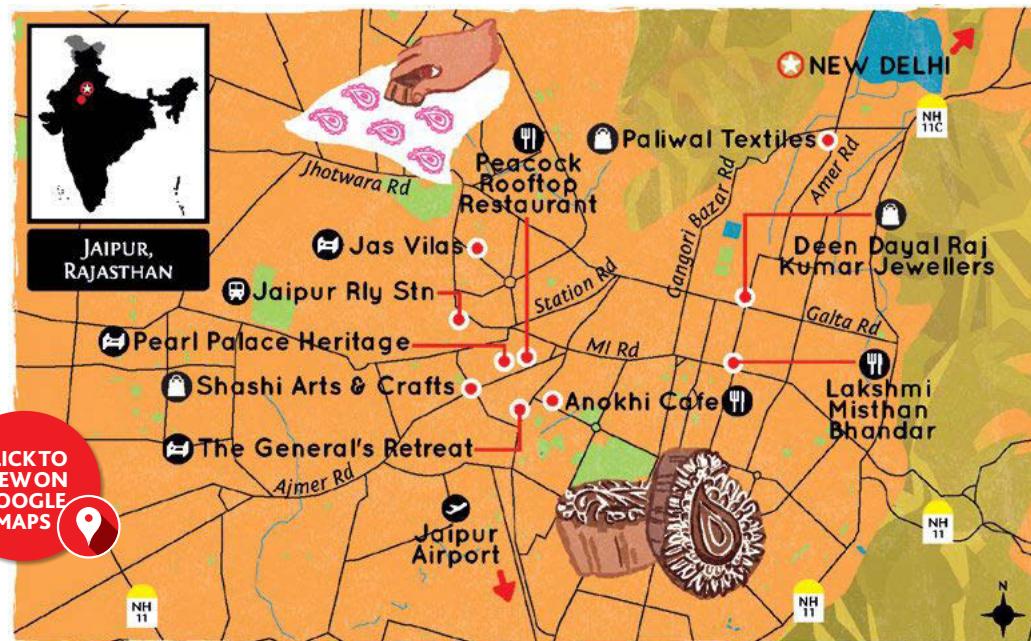
5. The Nilamber Suite at Pearl Palace Heritage sparkles with thikri (glass mosaic)

washing and setting them in pure gold or silver (for retail pieces). Back-breaking work, this: it can take a month to finish a large pendant.

Jaipur's crafts sell like hot cakes at chic exhibitions, thanks to the centuries-old methods that are put to practice in home studios like Deepak's. A day in the city's lively lanes is enough to awaken the artist in you as you learn techniques from the masters, and, with a variety of craft workshops to choose from, you, too, can make your own unique souvenir to bring back home.

WORDS KRUTTIKA NADIG

PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: New Delhi (270km) is a four-hour drive away.

Closest airport: Jaipur International Airport (15km) is connected to New Delhi by Indigo, Spicejet, Jet Airways and Air India (return fares from ₹ 1,998).

Closest railhead: Jaipur Railway Station (JP; within the city limits). Take the 12015 Ajmer Shatabdi Express (leaves New Delhi Railway

Station [NDLS] 6.05am, arrives JP 10.35am; ₹ 635 for AC chair car) and return by the 12016 Ajmer Shatabdi Express (leaves JP 5.50pm, arrives NDLS 10.40pm; ₹ 720 AC Chair Car).

GETTING AROUND

We used and liked the services of **Kaustubh Holidays, Tours & Travels** (00-91-9829016388; kaustubhholidays@gmail.com; from ₹ 2,200/ day for an AC indigo).

WHERE TO STAY

Pearl Palace Heritage:

With rooms designed along vibrant cultural themes, like Rajasthani, Tibetan and Mughal, this is a rich experience for the price. The hotel's sister restaurant Peacock Rooftop Restaurant has great food and is just across the road (00-91-141-2375242; www.pearlpalaceheritage.com; reservation@pearlpalaceheritage.com; 54, Gopal Bari, Lane 2, Ajmer Rd; from ₹ 2,400).

The General's Retreat: Although its service is basic, its spacious rooms surrounded by greenery are good to retire to after a day out in the town (00-91-141-2377134; www.generalsretreat.com; 9, Sardar Patel Marg; from ₹ 2,900 with breakfast).

Jas Vilas: A profusion of vines, flowers and colonial furniture lends quiet grace to this otherwise modest property with a small pool (00-91-141-2204638;

www.jasvilas.com, info@jasvilas.com; C-9-A, Sawai Jai Singh Highway, Bani Park; from ₹ 5,080 with breakfast).

WHAT TO EAT

The famous **Laxmi Mishthan Bhandar**, or LMB, has a decadent thali

that includes dal-baati, kachori and other local dishes (00-91-141-4001616; www.hotellmb.com; Johari Bazaar; 8am – 11pm; from ₹ 540 for Royal Rajasthani Thaal).

Peacock Rooftop Restaurant is a backpacker's favourite for its affordable Indian and continental food, leafy terrace overlooking Hathroi Fort and friendly owner Mr Singh (00-91-141-2373700;



see Where to Stay; 7am – 11pm; mains from ₹ 140). Jaipur also has the original **Anokhi Cafe** at which you can munch on tasty pizzas and sandwiches or unwind with a pot of tea after a spell of shopping in the boutique (00-91-141-4007245; www.anokhi.com; C11, 2nd Floor, KK Square, Prithviraj Rd, C Scheme; 9.30am – 7.30pm; sandwiches from ₹ 150).

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

There are loos at each of the workshop venues.

SAFETY

Do not place *minakari* jewellery in an oven without assistance.

While block printing, don't immerse your hands in the vegetable dyes for too long.

MEDICAL AID

There are many reputed hospitals in the city, the **Fortis Escorts Hospital**, Jaipur being one of them (00-91-141-2547009; www.fortishealthcare.com; Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, Malviya Nagar).

SHOPPING

Soma is your go-to boutique for Jaipuri block-printed apparel, accessories and linens in contemporary styles and soothing pastel colours. It's largely limited to women and kids. However, the clothes collection is of a high quality (00-91-141-2372246; somashop.com; A5, Jamnalal Bajaj Marg, C Scheme; 10am – 8pm; scarf: ₹ 150, single bedsheet: ₹ 770). **Amrapali**, a favourite with Bollywood celebrities, has its original store in Jaipur, where you can find everything from simple silver bangles and gold-plated earrings to heavy *polki* sets (Rajasthani-style jewellery) and designer interpretations of traditional craft. Look for Manish Arora's quirky collection (00-91-141-5118215/16; www.amrapalijewels.com; MI Rd, Panch Batti; 11am – 7.30pm; silver jewellery from ₹ 500 [toe ring]).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

These workshops aren't fun for kids, so you're better off leaving them at home.

GOOD TO KNOW

* As the workshops are introductory in nature, you'll be observing a lot. Don't expect to create a piece all by yourself from start to finish.

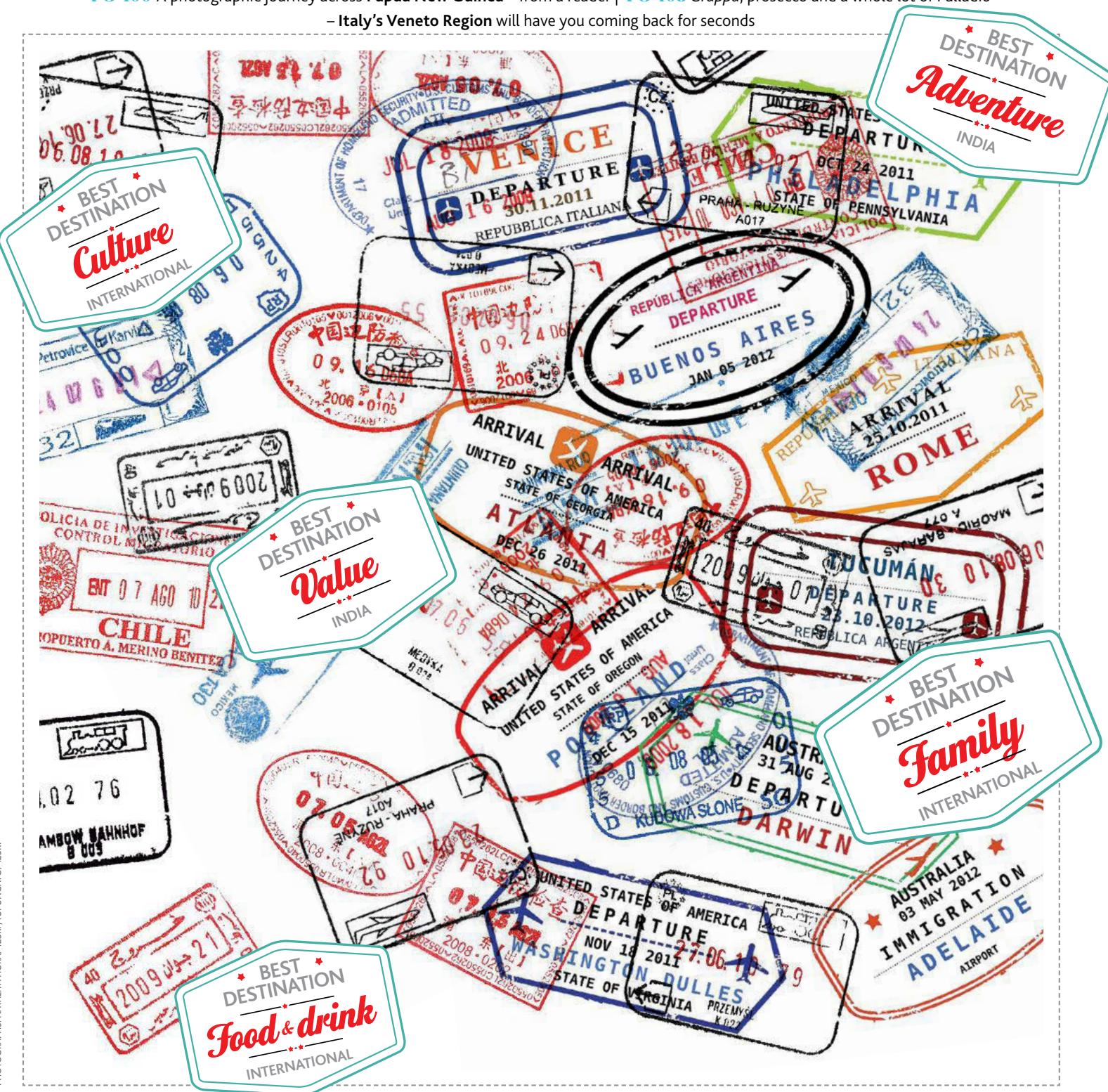
Features

PG 58 Uncork the Champagne: the winners of the **Lonely Planet Magazine India Travel Awards 2015** have been declared. Did your faves win?

PG 90 The USA's Sunshine State has plenty of different ways to keep you occupied – we've got 21 fun things to do the next time you're in **Florida**

PG 100 A photographic journey across **Papua New Guinea** – from a reader | **PG 108** Grappa, prosecco and a whole lot of Palladio

– **Italy's Veneto Region** will have you coming back for seconds



LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA TRAVEL AWARDS 2015

COMPILED BY KANICA GUPTA

MAP ILLUSTRATIONS FASHUTANA PATEL & PRAVEEN NADAR



PHOTOGRAPH: VIKRANT KHARAT
ALL MAPS AND SOME PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN THIS FEATURE
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BEST DESTINATIONS FOR

- CULTURE •
- ADVENTURE •
- WILDLIFE •
- RELAXATION •
- VALUE •
- FOOD & DRINK •
- FAMILY •
- ROMANCE •
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HOTELS

- LUXURY •
- BUSINESS •
- WILDLIFE RESORT •
- HERITAGE •
- RELAXATION •
- HOMESTAY •
- VALUE •
- ROMANCE •

HOW WE DID IT

It wasn't us, it was you. After our Expert Panel shortlisted nominees, YOU voted for your choices in our 32 categories, selecting your favourite destinations, your preferred hotels – and above all, your favourite travel experiences; you have yourself anointed the best in travel for this year.

You've done a good job, lauding your fave places to stay, the destinations you love kicking back at, and a whole lot more. And though they're called the Lonely Planet Magazine India Travel Awards, their prestige comes solely from you. After all, we might be a big name in travel, but we're nothing compared to the travellers, the people we write for – so give yourselves a pat on the back. You deserve a Blue Balloon as much as all of the winners.

And, as always, let's hope the winners go on trying to earn your love – and that the runners-up try harder, because the main thrust, the absolute core of these awards, is to make sure you have the time of your life, year after year.



Team LPMI's top tip

Download a translator app, especially if you're planning to visit remote areas

— Friyan Driver
Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

CHINA

CHINA is one of the most ancient civilisations in the world, with a highly-ritualised culture to boot, making a visit a whirlwind journey through history, tradition and art.



JIANKOU
While the Great Wall of China can be seen from a number of places, the most scenic and captured section is perhaps a stretch over the mountains outside Beijing, in Jiankou. The crumpling brickwork adds to the sense of drama and history.



XIAN
While its past as one of the Four Great Ancient Capitals of China is remarkable, today Xian is visited for the Terracotta Army, complete with chariots and horses that were buried with Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China, to protect him in his afterlife.



BEIJING
At the heart of the capital lies the Forbidden City, the world's largest palace complex and an epitome of traditional wooden Chinese architecture. Entry was once banned on pain of death, but, today, millions visit this World Heritage site.



SHANGHAI
Although dotted with skyscrapers, Shanghai has a rich architectural heritage few other cities can match. A walk along the Bund, the embankment along the Huangpu River, proves this with its melange of design influences.



LONGSHENG
Literally meaning 'dragon's back', Longsheng's emerald paddy terraces swirl down slopes in a mesmerising pattern that brings to mind the scales on a dragon. Head here post the summer rains in May for all the shades of green possible in existence.

RUNNERS-UP

1. ITALY

Rome, Florence, Venice... you know this is going to be a tour of art, architecture and history like no other!

2. INDIA

With a heterogenous mix of people, religion, rituals, and traditions India comes as no surprise on this list.

PUNJAB

FOR most people, Punjab is just yellow-and-green mustard fields, piping *paranthas* with butter, and loud, happy people. But scratch a little deeper and you can also uncover the fascinating history of Sikhism, wander the ruins of a thriving ancient civilisation, and walk through some truly unique museums and leave having not fully discovered the much under-represented side of the state.

Team LPMT's top tip

Try and help out at (and eat!) a langar (the meal at a Gurudwara) while you're in Punjab

– Mahesh Sagari
Art Director, Team LPMT

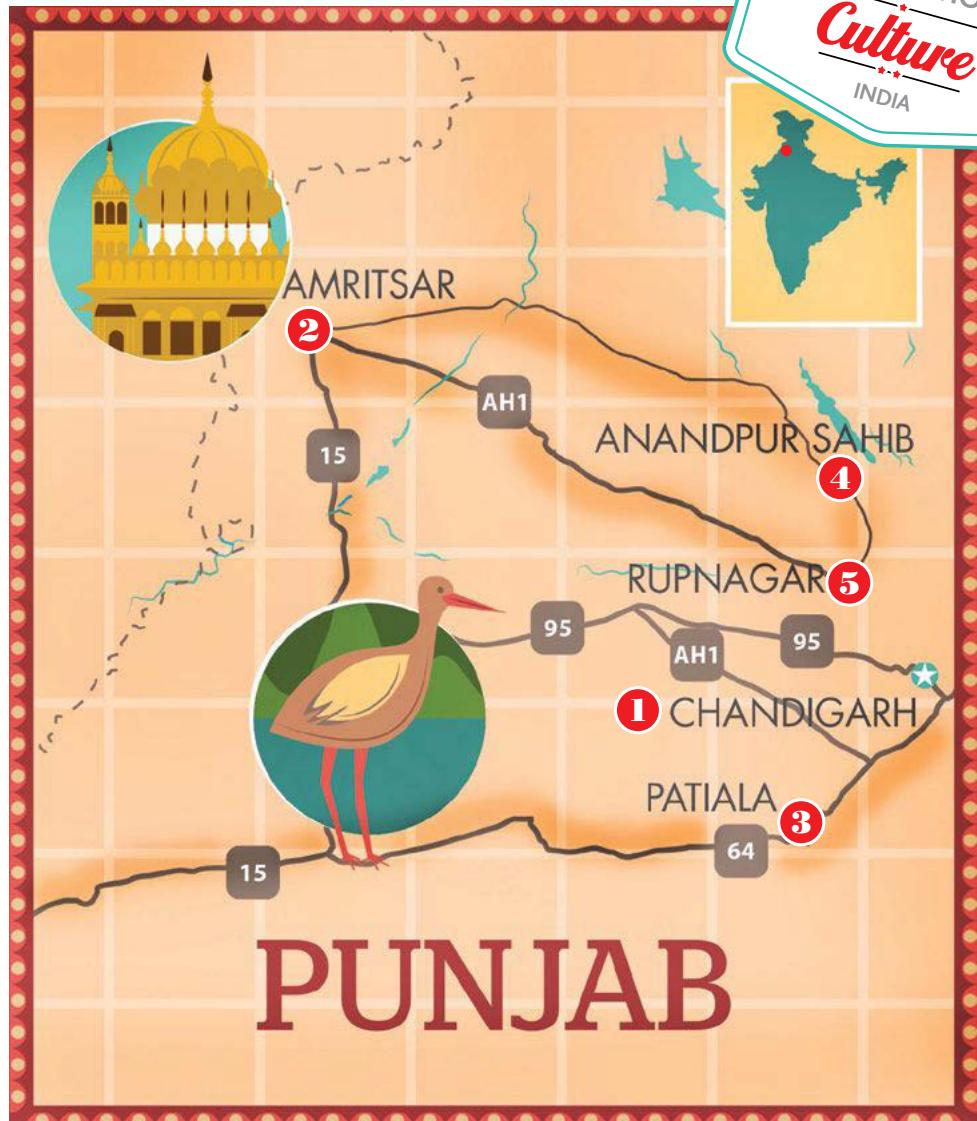
RUNNERS-UP

1. KARNATAKA

From the stately Mysore Palace to the gigantic statue of Buddha at Sravangbelagola, there's lots to see in Karnataka.

2. RAJASTHAN

This 'land of maharajas' has an astounding number of forts and palaces to set culture vultures flapping in excitement.



CHANDIGARH
The only thing that needs planning in this planned city is how you're going to hit all its museums on a single trip! Chandigarh has a wealth of cultural highlights – don't miss the Le Corbusier Centre, which highlights the city's construction.



AMRITSAR
This one's home to Sikhism's most sacred shrine, the Golden Temple, with its dome of gold, sitting in the middle of the Amrit Sarovar tank. Celebrate your newfound lightness of spirit by hitting the streets for amazing Punjabi food.



PATIALA
There's so much more to this city than the Patiala peg! Its history as the capital of an independent Sikh state is showcased at the Qila Mubarak, an 18th-century royal residence, the Old Moti Bagh Palace, and the Sheesh Mahal.



ANANDPUR SAHIB
Here lies Sikhism's second-most important shrine – Kesgar Sahib – and the interactive Virasat-e-Khalsa museum. The city comes alive during Holi Mohalla, which celebrates colour and the martial spirit of the Sikh people.



RUPNAGAR
Rupnagar is home to one of India's richest archeological finds – the excavated site that revealed an ancient Harappan township, dating back to the golden days of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Explore the on-site museum for a background.

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND might have more sheep than people, but the wide open spaces spell one thing – more space for adventure! The terrain, with snow-capped mountains and sandy coasts a short distance from each other, makes New Zealand ideal for all types of adventure-seekers, those wanting to test their mettle against the water, rock, air or ice.

Team LPMI's top tip

As pretty as Kiwi summers are, go in winter – our summer – because the scenery is just unreal then

Vardhan Kondvikar
Editor, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. SOUTH AFRICA

Other than the excellent jeep safaris, South Africa provides ample opportunities for surfing, diving and climbing.

2. AUSTRALIA

The Aussies love their water – surfing, snorkelling, jetboating, and, of course, scuba-diving to see the Great Barrier Reef.



1. QUEENSTOWN

Sitting at the edge of Lake Wakatipu, surrounded by mountains, Queenstown is stunning. But what draws visitors is its adventure sports: scuba-diving in the lake, jet boating on Dart River, skiing, bungee-jumping, sky-diving and more!



2. WANAKA

More laidback than Queenstown, Wanaka is also a popular adventure hub. It has the widest range of winter activities in the country, with premier slopes. Summer is no less exciting – biking, rafting, mountaineering...



3. ABEL TASMAN NATIONAL PARK

Although the smallest national park in NZ, it's one of the most popular for its scenic coastal walk. Adventure-seekers can also kayak in Golden Bay, or rev up their quad bikes along dedicated tracks.



4. MILFORD SOUND

Dubbed by Rudyard Kipling as the 'eighth wonder of the world' and arguably New Zealand's most famous destination, Milford Sound is stunning, with sheer rocky cliffs spotted with trees that 'avalanche' into the surrounding waters. Push through to the end: there's free entry into the hot pools!



5. FRANZ JOSEF GLACIER

Enjoy a helicopter ride up onto the popular glacier to experience a unique and challenging glacier walk through the ice tunnels and past frozen waterfalls. Push through to the end: there's free entry into the hot pools!



UTTARAKHAND

Team LPMI's top tip

Always use an experienced guide or a reputed company to organise your adventure activities

— Friyan Driver
Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

UTTARAKHAND

THE Himalayas play a starring role in making Uttarakhand a fave with adrenaline junkies – the slopes on which you can ski like a Swiss Miss, the source of rivers with white-water rapids, or just as a backdrop for some of the loveliest treks.



ROOP KUND
A glacial lake surrounded by rocky glaciers and snow-capped peaks makes Roop Kund a breathtaking trek, in more ways than one! Add the fact that, when the ice melts, well-preserved human skeletons can be seen at the bottom. Trek up and see!



RISHIKESH
Touted as the 'yoga capital of the world', Rishikesh is almost equally well-known for something a lot more heart-pumping... white-water rafting. It's one of the best spots in India for this, with Level 3 and 4 rapids on the Ganga to be conquered.



AULI
Between December and March, pro and amateur skiers just waiting to hit the gentle 5km-long slopes throng to Auli with the icy wind in their faces and an amazing view of Nanda Devi behind them.



VALLEY OF FLOWERS
This World Heritage site is a 17km trek both ways from Joshimath, but boy, is it worth it! In season (Jul–mid-Aug), the valley is carpeted with orchids, poppies, marigolds and a florist's shop-worth of colourful flowers.



NANDA DEVI NATIONAL PARK
This one, along with the Valley of Flowers, forms part of the larger Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. Although movement within is restricted, it's worth it for the colourful and abundant flora and fauna.

SOUTH AFRICA

REMEMBER sitting in front of the television and gaping at the wild and the beautiful? Chances are, every single animal you'd have seen there – predator to prey, tall to small, mighty to flighty – can be found wandering the endless South African veldt. Little surprise then that South Africa tops our list for the fourth consecutive year!

Team LPMI's top tip

Don't look just for the Big Five – there are loads of other really cool birds and animals to see as well

– Radhika Lalla
Assistant Editor, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. KENYA

It's home to the Masai Mara tribe and hordes of wildebeest and zebras, with red elephants and pink flamingoes for added colour!

2. TANZANIA

Ngorongoro Crater, Serengeti National Park and Mt Kilimanjaro are just some of the reasons Tanzania's on our list.



KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Kruger National Park is one of the best places in the world to watch animals in their natural habitat. Aside from the Big Five, there are an astounding 141 other mammal, 114 reptile and 507 bird species waiting to be ogled at!



ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Addo boasts a population of 600 elephants. It also exclusively has the Big Seven – the Five with the addition of the great white shark and southern right whale off the coast, and an endless supply of meerkats to boot.



HERMANUS

A day-trip from Cape Town, Hermanus is considered the best land-based destination for whale-watching. The gigantic, playful southern right whales flock to the bay during the Southern winter months, often with their calves in tow.



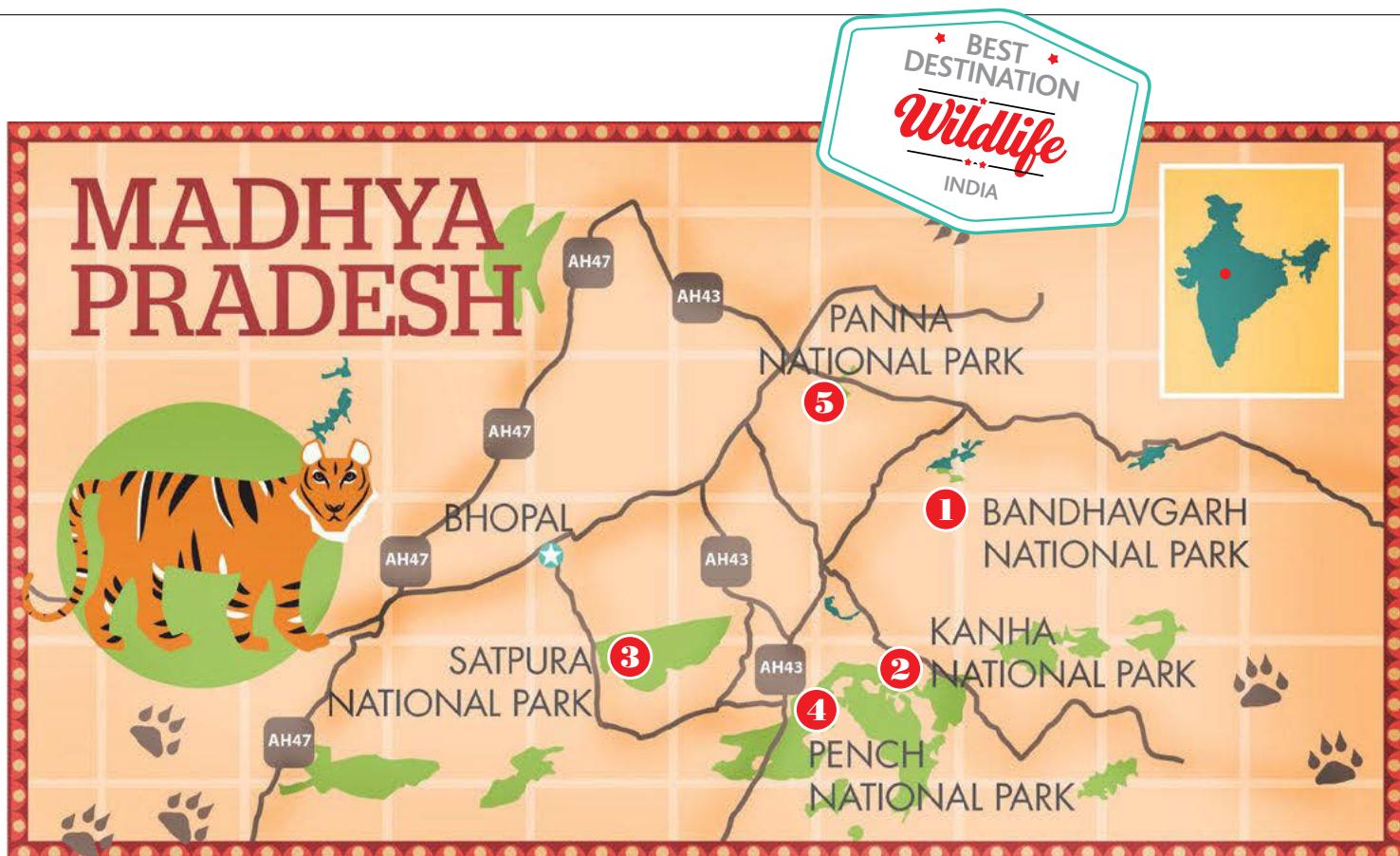
BOULDERS BEACH

So named for the 540 million year-old boulders that line the beach, Boulder Beach draws visitors mainly for the colony of endangered African penguins that have come to populate it since 1982.



DURBAN

Durban is great for shark-spotting – uShaka Marine World has the Southern Hemisphere's largest shark collection and shark cage diving. Or you can head out on research institute Natal Sharks Board's boat to see them in the wild.



MADHYA PRADESH

Team LPMI's top tip

Go after the rains – the jungles are lush and beautiful, and you'll spot the wildlife anyway

– Alisha Wadia

Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

MADHYA PRADESH has a couple of major attractions that can really set your heart thumping and your pulse racing... no, we're not talking about Khajuraho! With 30 per cent of the state under forest cover, MP boasts some of the best national parks in India to excite even the sternest wildlife enthusiast.

RUNNERS-UP

1. KAZIRANGA (ASSAM)

Home to two-thirds of the world's endangered one-horned rhinos and a high density of tigers and elephants, Kaziranga comes in a close second.

2. KARNATAKA

Part of the teeming-with-wildlife Western Ghats, Karnataka is rich in biodiversity and boasts five national parks and 25 wildlife sanctuaries.



1

BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

Although a relatively small park compared to some of the others on this list, Bandhavgarh boasts the highest density of royal Bengal tigers in the world (68 as of 2013), so you're almost sure to spot one on a couple of trips into the jungle!



2

KANHA NATIONAL PARK

Kanha is another great site for tiger-spotting. Add in a host of other mammals, including leopards, wild boar and the rare swamp deer, 300 species of birds and 26 species of reptiles, and you probably will not leave disappointed!



3

SATPURA NATIONAL PARK

Satpura offers fewer tiger sightings, but it boasts a wider collection of animals, such as the black buck and Malabar giant squirrels, leopards, four-horned antelopes, wild bison and crocodiles.



4

PENCH NATIONAL PARK

Possibly the setting for *The Jungle Book*, Pench is the third main tiger reserve in MP. While sightings are rarer than in the other two, the relative quiet, the towering teaks, and the abundance of deer, sloth and birds make it worthwhile.



5

PANNA NATIONAL PARK

The Ken River lazily streaming through Panna makes it a great picnic spot and ideal for watching wild dogs, nilgai, chital and other mammals. The adjoining Ken Gharial Sanctuary is also a good stop.



THE MALDIVES

THE 1,200 islands that make up the Maldives archipelago have cyan waters lapping against white sands, on some of the best beaches in the world. Add to that resorts competing to outdo each other in terms of service and hospitality, and you'd be hard-pressed not to let your hair down and just relax in this beautiful haven.

Team LPMI's top tip

Get an all-inclusive package: as almost everything has to be imported, the bills can get hefty!

— Alisha Wadia
Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. THE SEYCHELLES

Yet another stunning island with ultra luxe options where can be a beach bum and soak up the sun.

2. BALI, INDONESIA

The only thing warmer and nicer than the sun and surf here are the people, who go out of their way to ensure you have a relaxing trip.



1. SONEVA FUSHI

One of the largest resort islands, Soneva Fushi has eco-friendly villas made with natural materials scattered through vegetation. Relax in the spa, watch a movie in the outdoor theatre, and stargaze from the Maldives' only resort observatory.



2. ONE&ONLY REETHI RAH

For ultimate luxury, there's no other place you'd rather be. This manmade island has the unique feature of a sea canal running across the island. Dive, swim, get a massage, play tennis or lounge in bed in your sprawling villa.



3. BANYAN TREE VABBINFARU

Large sundecks, a great beach, massages, excellent diving and gourmet dining aside, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru is the only resort with a marine laboratory. It's amazing what planting coral and observing turtles can do!



4. CLUB MED KANI RESORT

It's a little hard to get a booking here, but it's worth it! There are 75 suites on stilts designed to resemble a palm tree, water sports and a diving school – there's even a disco on the island if that's your thing!



5. PARK HYATT MALDIVES HADAAHAA

Park Hyatt's maiden Maldives venture sees 50 modern villas juxtaposed against the natural beauty of the islands. Spa and dining aside, the property goes out of its way to provide you ways to relax.



4
AUROVILLE

PUDUCHERRY

PUDUCHERRY

WITH sunny Colonial villas along cobble streets, sandy beaches stretching along blue waters, and an international community of alternative-lifestyle seekers living in harmony, you'd be forgiven for thinking you've left India and taken up residence in a lazy French village instead. Spend the days eating, swimming and aimlessly walking about; a vacation just as a vacation should be.

Team LPMI's top tip

Rent a bicycle to get around – it's the best way to immerse yourself in the slow pace of life here

– Alisha Wadia

Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

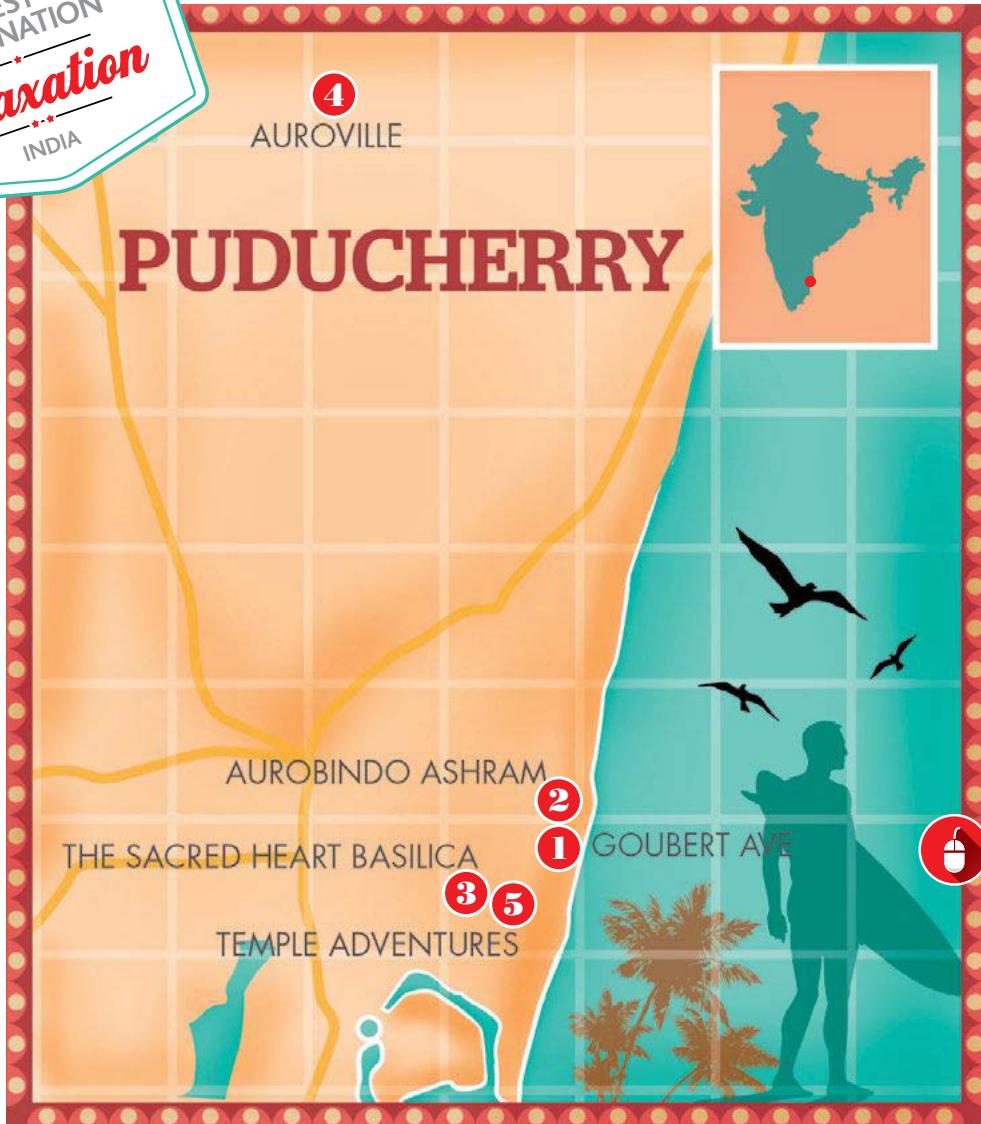
RUNNERS-UP

1. GOA

If ever a place was made for eating, drinking and napping in the sun, it would have to be Goa.

2. KERALA

Relaxing ayurvedic massages on a houseboat drifting by green paddy fields – if that isn't relaxing, we don't know what is!



GOUBERT AVENUE

The French vacated Puducherry in 1954, but left the French Quarter behind. Amble along the sea-facing Goubert Avenue: the Gallic villas in mustard, pink and blue lining either side of the cobble streets are a treat for sore eyes.



AUROBINDO ASHRAM

The founders, Sri Aurobindo and 'the Mother', believe in 'integral yoga' as a means to discover your higher self – buy a pass at the Central Bureau and participate in the evening meditation session to find inner peace.



SACRED HEART BASILICA

This 108-year-old church is a tribute to Gothic architecture, with its grand red-and-white façade, high domes, Latin cross and stained-glass windows. If you miss service, it's great to just slip into a pew and enjoy a moment's silence.



AUROVILLE

This 'City of Dawn' is a township conceptualised by 'the Mother' straight out of *That '70s Show*: a self-sustaining community where people live together beyond barriers of religion, geography, class and creed.



DIVE WITH TEMPLE ADVENTURES

Claiming to be 'India's only East Coast diving centre', Temple Adventures has a great day-long scuba-diving course in the relatively pristine and uncluttered waters off the coast of Puducherry.

THAILAND

WITH most return tickets often cheaper than the Mumbai – New Delhi ones, bargain shopping, affordable star hotels and yummy street food available for just a few baht, it's no wonder Thailand is such a hot favourite! Throw in sunny beaches, lush tropical forests and hardcore partying, and you're guaranteed bang (no pun intended) for your buck.

Team LPMI's top tip

As touristy as it is to do, go for a tuk-tuk ride to channel your inner James Bond

– Alisha Wadia
Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. SRI LANKA

Cheap tickets, a great exchange rate, endless beaches and lots of culture make Sri Lanka a fabulous VFM option.

2. TURKEY

The mountains of Cappadocia and the city of Istanbul have boundless delights that can be experienced inexpensively if you book in advance.



KOH SAMUI
Popular for its world-class beaches, water sports and beaches dos, the parties here have cheap entry fees, and visits to the island's other attractions, like the Big Buddha, are free. Try the eats at the stalls or Samui shacks on the south and west of the island.



BANGKOK
Carry a spare bag with you – Bangkok is the place for bargain shopping! The Chatuchak Weekend Market and Thanon Khao San Market are bustling with knock-off designer wear and home decor, and MBK Centre Mall has a glut of electronics.



KANCHANABURI
Sitting pretty amid tapioca and corn fields, Kanchanaburi doesn't show traces of its past till you visit the River Kwai Bridge. Built by the Japanese using bonded labour and Allied POWs who died in the process, it has a dark history that can be learnt at the nearby museum.



CHIANG MAI
A break from the bustle of the cities, Chiang Mai is rich in both culture and nature. Its past as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom has left behind many stunning temples. Check out the Saturday and Sunday Walking Streets for bargains.



PHUKET
Phuket district consists of Thailand's largest island, with 32 other islands surrounding it, which means lots of beaches! Make Phuket Town your base (for cheap digs) and visit Hat Karon Beach, or just hop onto a boat to one of the islands around.

BEST
DESTINATION
Value
INDIA

GOA

GOA is popular with local and international visitors alike for its many beaches, cheap alcohol, fresh seafood and buzzing nightlife. While there are many five-star resorts and experiences, there are an equal number of shacks and unstarred yet pleasant hotels so that you can enjoy a pleasant holiday without worrying about a depleting bank balance.

Team LPMI's top tip

Break the stereotype – don't be the rowdy tourist getting drunk, and do enjoy the place

– Vardhan Kondvikar
Editor, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. RAJASTHAN

Although it's the 'Land of Maharajas', there are a number of reasonably priced stays here, and sightseeing involves nominal entry fees.

2. GUJARAT

Old *havelis*, step wells, and the Rann of Kutch are just some of Gujarat's charms, and the thriftness of its people is passed on to visitors too.



1

BAGA

This is Goa's party central, with beachside shacks and clubs blaring music that nubile youngsters dance to. What Baga's also good for though, is water sports. There are a number of operators, so play your cards right and bargain well.



2

CALANGUTE

While the beach isn't the prettiest, with throngs of people and a Chowpatty-esque feel, the market has some great value eateries. There's Souza Lobo, Infantaria Bakery and Café Sussegado Souza that are all long-time favourites.



3

PALOLEM BEACH

This is probably the most scenic beach in South Goa, with white sands fringed by palm trees and fishing boats. The waters here are calm, and the shacks serve up great seafood.



4

MORJIM BEACH

This is a relatively low-key beach in otherwise trendy North Goa, which possibly translates into great deals on stays. What's more, it's the nesting ground of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles during the winter, which is well worth watching.



5

PANJIM

Visiting Fountainhas is like going back in time. Brightly-coloured Portuguese villas and chapels, most notably the Church of St Sebastian, are interspersed with cafés. Wandering around doesn't cost much, but will leave you richer.



**Team LPMI's
top tip**

**Have your
hotel address
written down
in Mandarin
so you can get
directions if
you need them**

Alisha Wadia
Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

HONG KONG

HONG KONG is the mother-lode for your taste buds. The dominant cuisine here is Cantonese, but you'll find more than enough choices that represent other regions of China and Asia, alongside a thriving Western array, all from the coolest chefs on the block.

RUNNERS-UP

1. SINGAPORE

The country that has tonnes of holidays, most of which are based on cultural events, has to be on this list.

2. ITALY

Food, festivals and some of the most interesting people you'll ever meet, Italy's a natural pick.



1. BUBBA GUMP SHRIMP COMPANY

(Peak Road)
An American-style diner with *Forrest Gump*-inspired interiors, Bubba Gump has excellent shrimp, a good cocktail selection and amazing views over the harbour, especially at sunset.



2. OZONE BAR (The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong, Austin Road W)

Ozone Bar claims to be the highest in the world, perched on the 118th floor of The Ritz-Carlton. With its geometrical interiors and great cocktails, an evening at Ozone is an evening well-spent.



3. DIN TAI FUNG DUMPLING HOUSE (Tsim Sha Tsui)

There is no dearth of dumpling houses here, but attention to detail and the best ingredients have made Din Tai Fung a Michelin-star restaurant and an acclaimed international chain.



4. THE LOBBY, PENINSULA HONG KONG (Tsim Sha Tsui)

Colonial opulence is what you get at the high tea here. Finger sandwiches, pastries, scones and clotted cream... you can feel the stiffening of your upper lip in true English style.



5. CITY HALL MAXIM'S CAFÉ (Edinburgh Place)

You'd be hard-pressed to find a more traditional Chinese tea and *dim sum* service. The dining hall has the traditional yet rare trolleys that come to your tables to serve portions of hot *dim sums* and buns.



NEW DELHI

Team LPMI's top tip

While New Delhi has great restaurants, nothing beats its street food – just be a bit careful

Alisha Wadia

PHOTOGRAPHS: JYOTHI KARAT (OZONE BAR, DIN TAI FUNG), SARAWUT SUKSAO / 123RF (BUBBA GUMP), COKEOMO / 123RF (CITY HALL), TARAS TARAPOREWALA (TOWN HALL), KRISHNA ANGIRA (SODABOTTLEOPENERWALA, SAN GIMIGNANO, SINGH SAHIB), HIMANSHU PANDYA (RARA AVIS)

LOVE or hate India's capital city, your stomach will certainly give it a unanimous thumbs up! From street food to five-star dining, *desi* to the more exotic French or Japanese... New Delhi ensures you get whatever your heart desires, dished up with finger-licking goodness.

RUNNERS-UP

1. GOA

Given the number of shacks serving up the catch of the day with a glass of beer, Goa is a foodie's delight!

2. AMRITSAR

'Warm and generous' best describes Amritsar – from the hot *paranthas* to the service that brings it to you.



1. TOWN HALL

(Khan Market)
Look past the continental and Asian on Town Hall's menu and head straight for the sushi bar. The produce is incredibly fresh given Delhi's land-locked state, and the selection is extensive – yellowfish, salmon, scallops, eel...



2. SODABOTTLE-OPENERWALA

(Khan Market)
Parsi food is thought to be hard to come by outside Mumbai, but this place dispels you of that notion. A more polished version of an Irani café, it has all the beloved staples like *patra ni macchi*.



3. RARA AVIS

(Greater Kailash II)
Rara Avis is a breath of fresh air in a swarm of restaurants serving 'French' – the cuisine is authentic, ranging from the standard chicken *cordon bleu* to the fancier terrines and croquettes, to even escargots!



4. SAN GIMIGNANO

(The Imperial, Janpath)
It might err on the side of expensive, but you'd be hard-pressed to find another Italian eatery that delivers such balance and flavour. The menu has interpretations of Tuscan fare.



5. SINGH SAHIB

(Nehru Place)
You know a place serves up mean food when you're even reaching for second helpings of *bhindi*! Singh Sahib is that good, with creamy *dal makhani*, rich butter chicken and succulent kebabs... this is as close to heaven as you'll get.



SINGAPORE

Team LPMI's top tip

Buy a Singapore City Pass for easy transport and discounts at a number of attractions

— Friyan Driver
Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

SINGAPORE has a lot going for it – it's a short flight away, it has plenty to delight kids and adults alike, and public transport that makes getting around easy. Throw in great shopping and food, and you'll hear a resounding 'yes' from the brood!



GARDENS BY THE BAY

This is a garden like no other – take the Skywalk between the towering SkyTree vertical gardens for stunning aerial views, visit the Flower Dome and Cloud Forest conservatories, and let the kids loose in the Children's Park.



SINGAPORE ZOO

It's hardly surprising that Singapore Zoo is one of the world's best, with over 2,500 inhabitants roaming about in spacious natural enclosures. Feed kangaroos and giraffes by hand and meet all your faves from the Animal Kingdom in one day.



SCIENCE CENTRE SINGAPORE

This one's great for kids who have an insatiable need to touch everything to see how it works. With over 1,000 interactive exhibits, everything from space to the human body is explained in an exciting way.



SINGAPORE FLYER

A ride on this massive observation wheel will treat you to stunning 360° views of the city's landmarks and its sparkling bay. If you're in the mood to splurge, you can treat the family to a meal or high tea up in the sky.



SENTOSA ISLAND

Sentosa is a world of fun, with a host of activities to choose from – visit the iconic Merlion statue, spend a day at Universal Studios, go ziplining in the MegaZip Adventure Park or frolic with 15,000 butterflies at the Butterfly Park.

RUNNERS-UP

1. SWITZERLAND

Stunning natural scenery and a host of activities have long made Switzerland a favourite.

2. MALAYSIA

With space-age skyscrapers and tropical jungle all in one place, Malaysia has something for everyone.

KERALA

THE description of 'God's own country' isn't far off the mark for Kerala, with its network of lazy backwaters, range of verdant mountains, and its 600km-long glistening coastline. It also has everything you could possibly want from a family vacation – natural settings, unusual stays, adventure sports, sightseeing, and great ayurveda treatments to ensure your body can handle it all!

**Team LPMI's
top tip**

**Take the
hop-on hop-off
boat to
explore the
backwaters
of Kochi**

– Friyan Driver
Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

RUNNERS-UP

1. RAJASTHAN

With its fairytale-esque history and famed hospitality, Rajasthan is a delight for young ones and adults alike.

2. GOA

Endless amounts of sun, surf and sand (and beer, for the 18+) make Goa a popular family vacation spot.



**1
VARKALA**

Varkala has a unique setting: 15m-high red cliffs draped in trees, with a golden beach stretching lazily into the Arabian Sea at its feet. The waters here are known for their restorative properties and spas abound, so sneak in a massage.



**2
WAYANAD**

There's only one word to describe Wayanad: green! It has mountainous forests with rice paddies and coffee plantations in perfect harmony. Take advantage of nature's bounty with a stay in one of the many treehouse resorts here.



**3
ALLEPPEY**

Known as the 'Venice of the East', Alleppey is riddled with canals and waterways and the houseboats that Kerala is known for. Skip the city centre and meander past emerald plantations and quiet villages in a houseboat of your very own.



**4
MUNNAR**

Munnar is as close as Kerala can get to a North Indian hill station, with picturesque tea plantations set against a backdrop of hills. The best way to take in its beauty is on foot, along hiking trails in and around Eravikulam National Park.



**5
FORT KOCHI**

Fort Kochi is the first European township in India, and colonial remnants still stand tall in the form of churches, bungalows and Fort Immanuel. The biggest draw here though, are the Chinese fishing nets, best photographed with the sun setting behind them.



SWITZERLAND

Team LPMI's top tip

The new Grand Tour, by road or rail, is a great way to get under the skin of the country

Primrose Monteiro-D'Souza
Managing Editor, Team LPMI

NOTHING spells romance like lip-syncing songs on the slopes of the snow-capped Swiss mountains. Yash Raj Films got one thing right – Switzerland *is* a haven for romantics. There are plenty of opportunities to kindle love, from cozying up in the back of a sled to steaming up a hot spa together.



ST MORITZ
This is an excellent resort town for seekers of romance and luxury. Take a sled ride through the alpine wilderness, get a couple's massage at a spa and dance together at one of the *après-ski* clubs...



GSTAAD
With 220km of pristine ski slopes, mountains on all sides, and designer brands lining the main promenade, Gstaad is a favourite with celebrities, skiers and honeymooners alike.



LUCERNE
Lucerne is home to that most photographed attraction: the Water Tower on Chapel Bridge. Munch on chestnuts as you tour the city hand-in-hand, and cap off the day with a romantic dinner cruise.



BAD RAGAZ
Nestled at the base of Pizol Mountain, Bad Ragaz is a historical spa and wellness resort town. Bubble away any couple troubles in the hot, curative waters and then relax together in the whirlpool and the spa grotto.



BELLINZONA
Three medieval castles rise dramatically over the quiet town of Bellinzona. Visit the castle grounds and museum together for a taste of history and excellent views of the surrounding mountains.

RUNNERS-UP

1. ITALY

With a laidback culture, Italy is ideal for couples to just relax and enjoy *la bella vita* (beautiful life).

2. THE SEYCHELLES

Topaz waters lapping against white sand with green hills in the distance – such idyllic beauty is made for romance.



Team LPMI's top tip

Do also spend some time in Dharamsala and eat your way across town – it has a slew of great eateries

– Hardika Panchal
Chief Copy Editor, Team LPMI

HIMACHAL PRADESH

HIMACHAL PRADESH is known as India's outdoor playground, but what few know is that it's great for lovebirds too – take up a new sport together, watch the sun coming up over the mountains or simply cuddle up against the cold. Whatever your idea of romance, you'll leave here with little cartoon hearts in your eyes.

PHOTOGRAPHS: HAJRA AHMED (SHIMLA, ANDRETTA), KRISHNA ANCIRA (BIR), TARAS TAKAOREWALA (THE GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK), SHIKHA TRIPATHI (CHAIL)

RUNNERS-UP

1. JAMMU & KASHMIR

The stunning beauty of the valley with its mountains, lakes and orchards draws lovebirds every year.

2. SIKKIM

Picture-perfect mountains and the quiet serenity of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries make Sikkim an unusual but lovely getaway.



1. SHIMLA

Shimla is a hill station popular with Indians, especially in the winter, for the blanket of snow that most of us crave but seldom experience. Walk down Mall Street, taking in the Colonial architecture, or hike up Jakhu Hill.



2. BIR & BILLING

There's nothing that says 'till death do us part' like launching off a cliff together. Yet that's exactly what you can do at Billing, a renowned paragliding launch point. Warm up with a walk around a Tibetan stupa at Bir.



3. ANDRETTA

Close to Palampur, Andretta is a quaint, not-yet-commercialised artists' colony. It boasts a pottery centre that hosts pottery workshops, although you can choose to have a shorter stay too.



4. THE GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

Those who like it rough and wild would love trekking through this newly-annointed UNESCO World Heritage site.



5. CHAIL

For a luxury stay without the crowds, look no further than Chail. The Maharaja's Palace has a host of spacious suites, cottages and log cabins with ornate antiques and plush carpeting.



LONDON

Team LPMI's top tip

Keep all receipts for expensive purchases handy, and get a VAT refund while leaving

— Friyan Driver
Travel Researcher, Team LPMI

MULTI-storey department stores, streets lined with one designer outlet after another, open-air markets bustling with stalls, kitschy boutiques and a really quirky landmark that epitomises retail theatre. London has something to appeal to every type of shopper out there.



OXFORD STREET

Allegedly Europe's busiest shopping street, Oxford Street is home to the flagship outlets of some of London's major department and hosts the who's-who of international designer brands as well.



REGENT STREET

This is where you can find a number of mid-priced lifestyle outlets and the largest Hamley's and Burberry outlets in the world. With the All Souls Church and University of Westminster in the background, it's a pretty walk, too.



BOROUGH MARKET

This landmark food market draws everyone from casual tourists to up-and-coming masterchefs and restaurateurs for the quality and breadth of produce available.



CAMDEN MARKET

'Market' is a bit of a misnomer here – it's a series of interconnected open-air markets and proper retail establishments where you can buy pretty much everything you'll ever need.



HARRODS

Visiting London's foremost store isn't a shopping trip, it's an experience. One that combines 330 departments of products with retail services, a memorial to Princess Di and an Egyptian elevator thrown in for heightened drama.

RUNNERS-UP

1. DUBAI

Given that one of Dubai's biggest tourism pulls is its shopping festival, its presence on this list should come as no surprise!

2. NEW YORK CITY

With everything from designer couture to edgy streetwear, New York is every fashionista's dream city.

MUMBAI

MUMBAI is a city of extremes, home to the stock market and Bollywood on one hand, and one of the largest slums in the world on the other. It's the same extremism that spills over into her retail landscape, with swanky international-standard malls at one end of the spectrum and open-air street stalls on the other, both often catering to the same clientele! Whichever your preference, you're sure to find your heart's every desire here.

RUNNERS-UP

1. NEW DELHI

New Delhi is dotted with open markets and quirky standalone boutiques where you can pick up some unique clothes and handicrafts.

2. KOLKATA

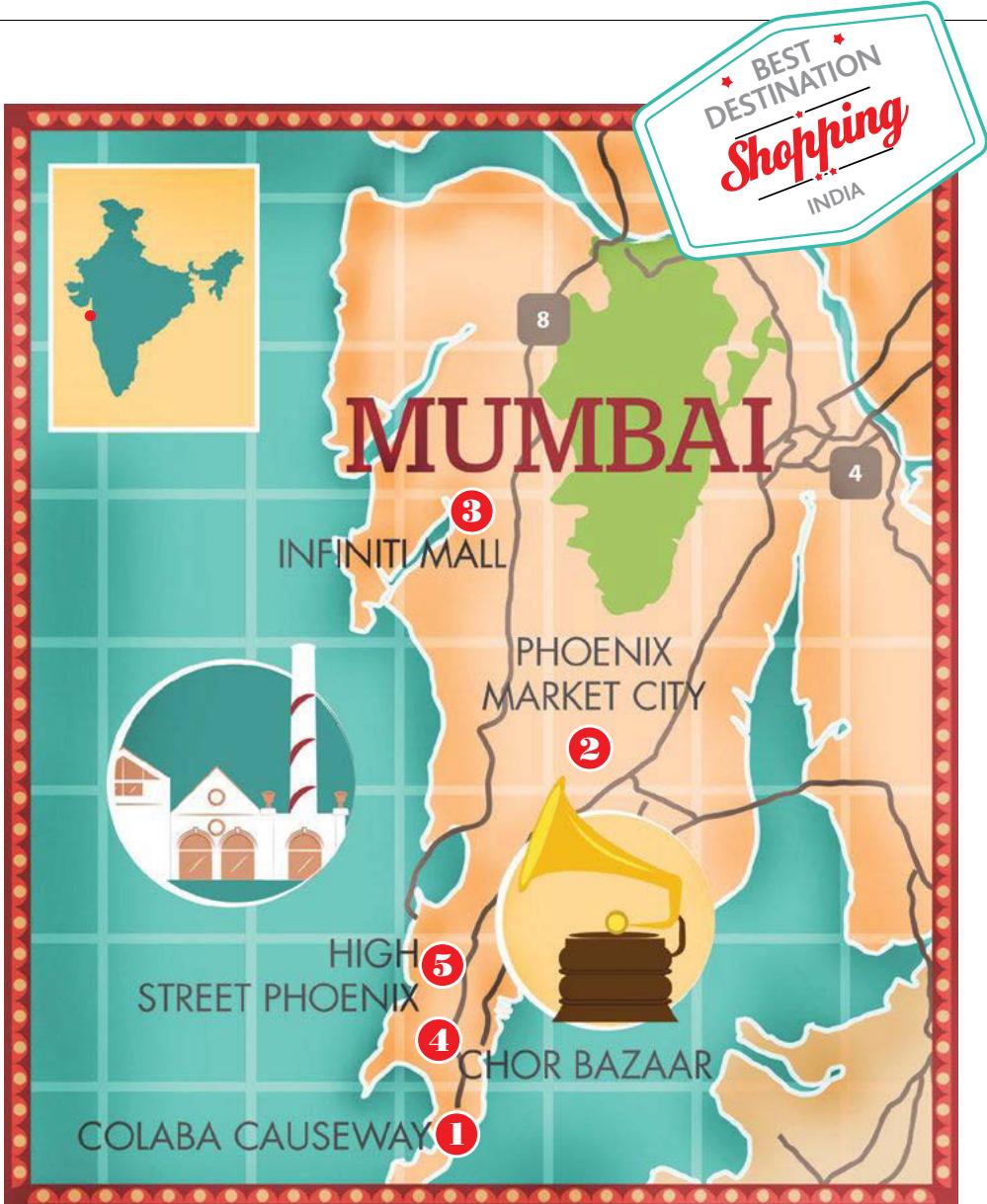
Known more for its food than shopping, Kolkata is nonetheless a great option for textiles and terracotta items.

Team LPMI's top tip

Head to Crawford Market for cool crockery, which is also where many restaurants pick it up from

— Alisha Wadia

Senior Travel Researcher, Team LPMI



COLABA CAUSEWAY

Pick up funky accessories and footwear, export-surplus branded clothes and excellent branded knockoff watches and bags here at a steal, provided you know how to bargain.



PHOENIX MARKET CITY

Sprawled over 2.1 million sq ft, Phoenix Market City has international favourites such as Debenhams, H&M, Zara, all the electronics majors, a multiplex, snow park, and bowling alley for the kids.



INFINITI MALL, MALAD

The 'mall with infinite experiences' tagline might be a bit of a stretch, but not by much! Packed to the gills, you can buy pretty much anything here, from groceries and a greeting card to your wedding trousseau.



CHOR BAZAAR

This second-hand flea market is a treasure trove for antique-seekers. Vintage Bollywood posters, antique car parts, Victorian furniture and a host of random bits and bobs can be bought cheap post a satisfying haggle.



HIGH STREET PHOENIX

High Street Phoenix is always buzzing with shoppers, which is hardly surprising, given that it's home to over 500 international and local brands, a hypermarket, a movie theatre and a host of restaurants.





SOUTH KOREA

WHILE border troubles with North Korea have made travellers wary of approaching the Republic of Korea, the siren call of 5,000 years of culture, mashed with futuristic technology and stunning coastal and mountain scapes, has increasingly been drawing travellers to this gem of a country.

RUNNERS-UP

1. OMAN

Traditional Bedouin culture, spectacular natural beauty and warm hospitality have made people sit up and take notice of Oman.

2. MEXICO

There's more to Mexico than tequila and tacos: its Mayan temples, Spanish colonial monuments and world-class museums are worth exploring.

Team LPMI's top tip

It's considered rude to eat with your hands – watch the locals for cues

– Jeremiah Christianand Rao
Photo Editor, Team LPMI



1. SEOUL

The capital is a vibrant city with an infectious energy, a great balance of the old and new. Revisit the past at the Gyeongbokgung Palace and marvel at the new-age skyline. Stop by a charming teahouse and have *soju* and snacks at Gwangjang Market.



2. BUSAN

South Korea's second-largest city, Busan has a much more relaxed vibe than Seoul. This one's got something for everyone – fish markets and kitschy cafés, the world's largest department store, mountains and a wide coastline, and many temples.



3. BOSEONG COUNTY

The green tea capital of South Korea, this picturesque county has row upon row of tea bushes marching away into the near distance. Make some time by evening for a trip to the nearby Yulpo Beach to take in a stunning sunset.



4. GYEONGJU-SI

It's not hard to see why this is designated 'the museum without walls' – once the capital of the Shilla Dynasty, it's packed with tombs, museums and monuments. Don't miss the imposing Buddha sculpture at Seokguram Grotto.



5. JEJU-DO

South Korea's largest island and one of the Seven Wonders of Nature since 2011, Jeju-do has plenty to keep you occupied: lounge on the beaches, hike up Hallasan, walk the Jeju Olle Trail and visit Manjanggul, a network of lava tubes and caves.

DIU

2 VANAKBARA

3 NAGOA BEACH

DIU FORT 1





Team LPMI's top tip

Head up to the lighthouse at Diu Fort for spectacular views at sunset

— Radhika Lalla
Assistant Editor, Team LPMI



DIU FORT
Built in 1535 and added onto in the subsequent decade, the fort is impressive despite being in ruins. Skirting the sea on three sides, it's protected by a double moat and has well-preserved bronze cannons. The attached lighthouse is Diu's highest point.



VANAKBARA
A little fishing port at the eastern end of the island, Vanakbara is Diu at its authentic best. Watch the gaily-coloured fishing boats coming in with their fresh catch in the mornings, and enjoy the atmosphere of bustling village life.



NAGOA BEACH
Nagoa Beach is probably the most popular beach here. There's plenty of space to run or lounge about, the waters are clean and gentle enough to frolic in, and the unique 'hoka' palms that fringe it add to its photo-worthiness.



DEVKA BEACH
At Devka Beach, you can wet your feet in the sea foam and enjoy the black sand under your feet. While swimming is a bit tricky due to the rocks, you can walk into the sea and collect sea-shells at low tide, or just sit back with a beer and enjoy the sunset.



CHURCH OF BOM JESUS
This church is an example of Colonial Portuguese architecture at the height of its glory. High ceilings, richly carved doors and the statues of six saints are eye-catching, but what's really marvellous is the gilded wooden altar.

DAMAN & DIU

THE Union Territory of Daman and Diu has always been popular as a weekend getaway for Mumbaiites for cheap tipple, and for the citizens of Gujarat, for, well, any tipple. But what more and more people are discovering now is its rustic charm – a lingering sense of old Portugal and rugged beaches uncluttered with tourists and shacks, and an overall sense of quietude that soothes the soul. And cheap booze, let's not forget!

RUNNERS-UP

1. MEGHALAYA

From the colonial charm of Shillong to the waterfalls of Cherrapunjee, this 'abode of clouds' mountain state is a real up-and-comer.

2. ORISSA

The Sun Temple at Konark and Puri aside, there are a number of nature sanctuaries and textile outposts that are gaining in popularity.

*India's Favourite
Destination*

THE USA

7 SAN FRANCISCO

8 LAS VEGAS



5 GRAND CANYON
NATIONAL PARK



3 ALASKA

1 HAWAII

CHICAGO



Team LPMI's top tip

If you're driving yourself, stay away from interstates and use the prettier, smaller roads

— Vardhan Kondvikar
Editor, Team LPMI



THE USA

AMERICA is the land of endless choice, and that's not just true for its supermarkets! Great cities to rural farms, redwood forests to rippling fields, snow-capped mountains to sunny coasts, cultural immersions to mindless partying – there's no dearth of experiences to be had here. And it's a country made for road-trips, with millions of miles of highway under the open skies just waiting to take you to whatever's your vision of the Great American Dream.



HAWAII

Hawaii is a technicolour paradise, with white sands, blue waters and green palms waiting to be admired. Life is easygoing and laidback with *luau*s and *leis*, umbrella-ed drinks, surfing and hiking, and a host of other things.

MIAMI

This 'Magic City' is designed to overwhelm your senses. Apart from beaches, it's choc-a-block with excellent museums and art centres, most notably the Vizcaya Museum and Adrienne Arsht Center for Performing Arts.

ALASKA

Alaska can be described in a couple of words: 'epic scale'. Everything here is larger than life, home as it is to the USA's largest national park, state park and national forest, tallest peak, and with a glacier bigger than all of Switzerland to boot.

NEW ENGLAND

The six states that make up New England hold the key to the USA's beginning, with the Pilgrim Fathers landing here. Aside from history, it's the natural beauty, with the Appalachian mountains and miles of coastline that draws people.



GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

We've all seen pictures of the Grand Canyon, but they don't do it justice. Standing on the rim of the deep gorge of the Colorado River is, at once, terrifying and awe-inspiring, and the views are simply sublime.

CHICAGO

There's much more to do in the Windy City than you'd think. The towering skyline has amazing architecture, best admired on a river cruise. Chicago is also culture-crazy – aside from the excellent museums, the city is littered with modern art.

SAN FRANCISCO

A drive on the iconic Golden Gate Bridge over the glistening bay to reach San Francisco sets the tone. There's much to do – visit the Crookedest Street in the world, chow down at Fisherman's Wharf, and explore Alcatraz Island...

LAS VEGAS

Elvis lookalikes saunter among gamblers at the city's glittering casinos, with endless cocktails and the enticing blackjack tables making you lose all track of time. Blowing up your money never felt this good!

NEW YORK CITY

This is a city that's as multi-faceted as its people. It's one of the fashion and shopping capitals of the world, has more museums and art galleries than an aficionado would know what to do with, and a smorgasbord of eats to indulge in.

VICTORIA-JUNGFRAU GRAND HOTEL & SPA

INTERLAKEN, SWITZERLAND

If the views of two beautiful lakes against the backdrop of the snow-capped Jungfrau peak weren't enough, there's plenty more at this five-star hotel to completely overwhelm your senses. The 5,500sqm spa has an extensive pool, sauna and steam bath that take care of all the aches and pains earned after a session with the in-house personal trainer. Post this, you can unwind at the cigar lounge before enjoying exquisite international and Italian cuisine at the highly-awarded La Terrasse and Quaranta Uno restaurants respectively, with a glass of sommelier-recommended wine. Too much of a good thing, perhaps, but who's complaining?

RUNNERS-UP

1. & BEYOND, MNEMBA ISLAND, ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA
2. QUALIA, HAMILTON ISLAND, AUSTRALIA

Don't Miss

- * The Sensai Select Spa has a range of exclusive beauty rituals that combine the therapeutic powers of Japanese spring water and Koishimaru silk for ultimate pampering.
- * There are a number of indoor and outdoor tennis courts for those wanting an alternative to the gym.
- * The Victoria Terrace has a great selection of desserts and drinks to accompany stunning views of the Jungfrau.

Find out more: victoria-jungfrau.ch



Don't Miss

- * To truly appreciate the romantic history of the palace, take the hour-long guided heritage walk and enjoy the evening cultural show.
- * Enjoy the lake whichever way you like – getting a massage on the Jiva spa boat or noshing by the open grill on the Gangaur barge cruise.
- * High tea at Bhairao is not to be missed, where Beluga caviar, cream-clotted scones, and exotic fruit tarts are served on silver platters... literally.

Find out more: tajhotels.com

TAJ LAKE PALACE UDAIPUR

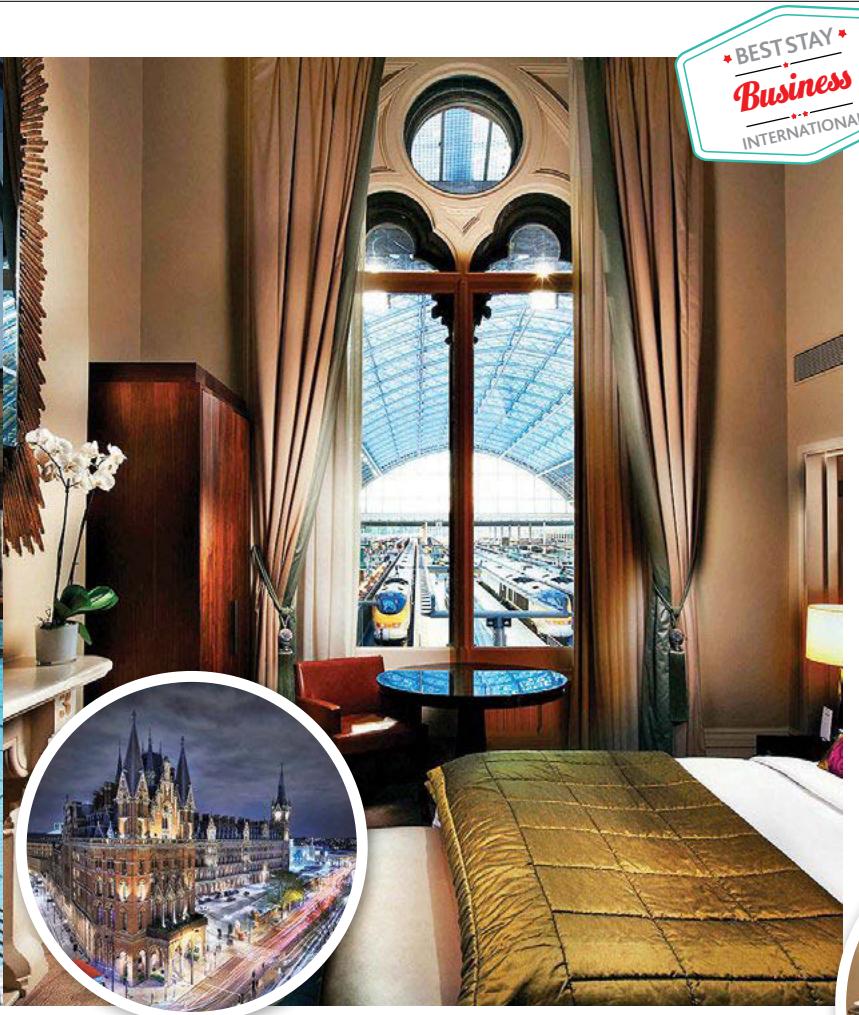
RAJASTHAN

BUILT by Maharana Jagat Singh II in 1743 as a 'pleasure palace', the historic Taj Lake Palace, a white marble wonder that seemingly floats on Lake Pichola, today continues to dish out pleasure, albeit of a more PG-rated kind than the prince originally intended! The rooms are decorated with mosaics and frescoes, and full of ornately-carved furniture, yet have all the modern amenities imaginable, including a pillow menu and 24-hour butler service. Gourmet dining, horse-back riding, boat rides into the sunset, vintage car rides and yoga sessions are just some of the other things you can do to spoil yourself rotten, royal-style.

RUNNERS-UP

1. TAJ RAMBAGH PALACE, JAIPUR
2. THE OBEROI AMARVILAS, AGRA





ST PANCRAS RENAISSANCE HOTEL LONDON

THE UK

LOCATION is everything in London, which is why this hotel, literally a stone's throw from King's Cross station, is such a great choice. But there's so much more to this hotel than convenience and all the modern facilities a business traveller might need. The hotel was born as the Midland Grand in 1873, and intensive efforts have seen it restored to those halcyon days as a beacon of *Great Gatsby*-esque Victoriana, with sweeping staircases, chandeliered lobbies and diamond-studded bars that will make you feel like a swish business tycoon indeed!

RUNNERS-UP

1. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, HONG KONG
2. ANDAZ, 5TH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, THE USA

Don't Miss

* There are 10 event rooms, the largest of which can hold up to 575 people, ideal for business meetings and conferences of all sizes.

* Thirty-eight of the 245 rooms are located in the original Gothic structure and provide unparalleled opulence, complete with a butler service, for those wanting to celebrate a job well done!

* The spa is as well-decked as the rest of the hotel, with a pool done in Victorian tiling, and is ideal post a hard day's work.

Find out more: stpancras.com/hotel



ITC MAURYA

NEW DELHI

Don't Miss

* The hotel is conveniently located 7km from the domestic airport, and organises a shuttle transfer on request.

* You can treat a client at the award-winning Bukhara or Dum Phukt – melt-in-the-mouth kebabs will ensure your business deal is signed on the spot!

* There are indoor and outdoor banqueting facilities, with a maximum capacity of about 750 people, for all business and networking needs.

Find out more: itc-hotels.in/Hotels/itcmaurya.aspx



RUNNERS-UP

1. THE PALLADIUM HOTEL, MUMBAI
2. SOFITEL, BANDRA-KURLA COMPLEX, MUMBAI

ELEPHANT REACH

YALA NATIONAL PARK, SRI LANKA

LEPHANT REACH is absolutely worth the long drive from Colombo, as it helps you get up-close with Sri Lanka's teeming wildlife in Ruhuna Yala National Park without compromising on the comforts of the urban jungle. Spend the days spotting elephants, deer, crocodiles and over 120 species of birds at Yala with your experienced naturalist, and let your hair down at night in your rustic wood-and-stone chalet, complete with satellite TV, air-conditioning and your favourite cocktail!

RUNNERS-UP

1. MALAMALA MAIN CAMP, SOUTH AFRICA
2. GOVERNORS' CAMP, MASAI MARA, KENYA

Don't Miss

- * There are a number of experiences on offer beyond a safari – like staying in a tree-hut on a *chena* farm or camping inside Yala.
- * Enjoy fine dining at Tusks, the poolside restaurant that serves some delicious gourmet Sri Lankan cuisine and organises a great BBQ night, too.
- * Keep an eye out for leopards – according to a documentary filmed here, Yala has over 30 of them.

Find out more: elephantreach.com



Don't Miss

- * Raise a glass of champagne to panoramic views of the surrounding jungle from the Observation Tower, especially at sunset.
- * Catch the hour-long complimentary natural history session on Ranthambore and its tigers with the in-house specialist.
- * Check out the lovely vegetable dye and charcoal paintings of Ranthambore tigers dotting the hotel, and interact with local artists.

Find out more: oberoihotels.com

THE OBEROI VANYAVILAS

RANTHAMBORE, RAJASTHAN

IT'S not just the tigers in Ranthambore that are royal. With luxury temperature-controlled wi-fi-enabled tents complete with claw-footed tubs set amid 20 acres of landscaped garden, gourmet meals accompanied by a crackling bonfire and live folk music, and a huge swimming pool, spa and fitness centre, you can't help but feel as pampered at the Oberoi Vanyavilas, as the maharajas of old did on their hunting expeditions into the jungle.

RUNNERS-UP

1. SAMODE SAFARI LODGE, BANDHAVGARH, MADHYA PRADESH
2. BAGH VAN – TAJ SAFARI LODGE, PENCH, MADHYA PRADESH





TAJ UMAID BHAWAN PALACE JODHPUR, RAJASTHAN

YOU can't get more heritage than when living with erstwhile royalty, and that's exactly what you get at Taj Umaid Bhawan. Completed in 1943, the sandstone-and-marble Art Deco building overlooks 26 acres of garden, making it one of the largest private residences in the world. While you can't enter the royal residence (for obvious reasons), the well-appointed museum, ornate murals and paintings, elegant dining rooms and upper-crust sporting facilities of horse-back riding and croquet ensure that you feel like a part of the history and culture of this property!

RUNNERS-UP

1. UDAI BILAS PALACE, DUNGARPUR, RAJASTHAN
2. THE IMPERIAL, NEW DELHI



Don't Miss

- * Admire the Edwardian and Victorian antiques in the museum with a flute of bubbly in hand, on the aptly-named Museum Champagne Walk.
- * Take in the sights and sounds of Jodhpur from one of the vintage cars that are part of the royal collection.
- * The Trophy Bar gives you a glimpse of the maharajas' wild side, with tiger-skin cushions, fishing gear and a 6ft elephant tusk, hunted in 1927, on display.

Find out more:
tajhotels.com



THE LEELA KOVALAM KERALA



Don't Miss

AS you take in the endless views of golden sand, green palms and the iridescent sea that make up the stunning Kovalam coastline from the hotel's cliffside perch, you feel yourself relaxing immediately. And, if that's not enough, two infinity pools overlooking the Arabian Sea, a clubhouse with billiards, archery, badminton *et al*, five dining options and an international spa and ayurvedic centre will certainly go a long way in easing that tension from your shoulders!

RUNNERS-UP

1. WILDFLOWER HALL, SHIMLA IN THE HIMALAYAS, MASHOBRA, HIMACHAL PRADESH
2. ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS, UTTARAKHAND

* Aside from ayurvedic treatments, the spa has three relaxation programmes ranging from one to three days for those truly in need of de-stressing.

* Curl your toes into the sand and enjoy the sea breeze over the catch of the day at the beachside Tides restaurant.

* Kick back with your favourite drink and marvel at the lovely purples, pinks and oranges of the sun setting over the coast from Skybar.

Find out more:
theleela.com



SILVER BROOK ESTATE

COORG, KARNATAKA

LARGE, airy rooms with attached bathrooms and a wraparound verandah at the heart of a property that boasts a thriving coffee and a spice plantation with a perennial stream gurgling gently through... this picture-perfect setting automatically makes Silver Brook a cut above the numerous homestay options available. Add in the experienced warmth and hospitality of owners Yogesh Krishnaswamy and Revathi Iyer, and there's no questioning why this is our winner.

RUNNERS-UP

1. MAACHI, SINDHUDURG, MAHARASHTRA
2. TATHAGATA FARM, DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL

Don't Miss

- * The estate attracts a host of colourful butterflies and apparently over a hundred species of birds, so get walking and see how many you can spot.
- * Local Coorgi, Indian or continental – whichever you request, the meals here are quite delicious.
- * Check out the small library and range of indoor board games when you're in the mood to do nothing at all.

Find out more:
silverbrookestate.com

THE HOUSE OF MG

AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

BUILT in 1924 as the house of textile magnate Mangaldas Girdhardas, the literally-named The House of MG is today a boutique heritage hotel in the heart of Old Ahmedabad. The rooms are spacious and aesthetically pleasing, each with its own verandah, air-conditioning, en suite bathroom and satellite flat-screen TV. Add to it a bright orange facade, stained glass windows, floral murals, marble flooring and a Baroque influence, and you'll be in for a wonderfully warm and kitschy stay that delivers bang for your buck, and more besides.

RUNNERS-UP

1. KU GOA MORJIM HOTEL, GOA
2. BODHI TREE, KOLKATA

Don't Miss

* The indoor Lotus Pool, so named for the digitally-created lotus fresco adorning the ceiling, is a swim-and-dine concept where you can while away hours.

* The unlimited Gujarati *thali* at Agashiyi, the terrace restaurant, is excellent and total value-for-money.

* Take the shuttle to the 250-year-old Mangaldas ni Haveli, a traditional *haveli* that has been restored by the hotel and which now houses a café and crafts centre.

Find out more:
houseofmg.com



RI KYNJAI—SERENITY BY THE LAKE

SHILLONG, MEGHALAYA

THOSE looking for mirrored ceilings and red hearts are out of luck; this year's pick for romance is the aptly-named Ri Kynjai (which translates to 'serenity by the lake'), with thatched cottages spread over 45 acres of lush paddy fields and gardens overlooking placid Umiam Lake. From the fireplace that inspires whispered confessions, to the beautiful sunrise from the balcony that sees shared smiles, to the lovely pathways on which lovers walk hand-in-hand, this place is made for love of the forever kind.

RUNNERS-UP

1. THE TAMARA COORG, MADIKERI, KARNATAKA
2. MARY BUDDEN ESTATE, ALMORA, UTTARAKHAND

Don't Miss

* Spend a lazy day kayaking on Umiam Lake, followed by a lovely picnic on one of the little islands.

* Book a couple's massage at the spa; you can experiment with the local Khasi hot bath and other curative treatments that are exclusive to this region.

* Enjoy a meal for two at Sao Aiorn, especially the Northeastern specialties of smoked pork with bamboo shoot and Cherrapunji chicken.

Find out more:
rikynjai.com



MEET OUR EXPERT PANEL



VARDHAN KONDVIKAR
Editor, Lonely Planet Magazine India

A travel and automobile journalist, Vardhan made the perfectly sensible decision of moving from driving fast cars to sitting with women on exotic beaches and pretending to write serious travel stories.



VEENA PATIL
Managing Director, Veena World

Known in the travel industry for her creative mind, Veena expanded the family business by launching tours for women, senior citizens and students, as well as spiritual tours, and new divisions. She's also a prolific writer and columnist.



MANU KASHYAP
Director, Windmill Holidays

In the travel industry for the past 15 years, Manu started her boutique holiday company four years ago to help travellers with tailor-made itineraries.



SUCHETA POTNIS & HANS TUINMAN
Founders, www.travellerspalm.com

Dutchman Hans, who has done his thesis on India's untouchables, and Sucheta, the first Indian woman to lead foreign tourists on a camel safari across the Thar, have been organising inbound tours around India for over 30 years.



MADHAVAN MENON
Managing Director, Thomas Cook India Ltd

Madhavan has experience of over 34 years in fields like banking, finance and travel-related foreign exchange management, and has been MD of Thomas Cook since 2006.



DEEP KALRA
CEO, www.makemytrip.com

The founder of makemytrip.com is also a founding member of 'I am Gurgaon', an NGO focused on improving the quality of life in Gurgaon. His other interests include swimming, quizzing, adventure sports and, of course, travelling.

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21 fun THINGS TO DO IN FLORIDA

The Sunshine State's got a great mix of attractions that appeal to all sorts – from cultural to kid-friendly and just plain weird, with everything in between

WORDS HASHIM BADANI

BEFORE I was fully able to grasp the term 'Swing State', I assumed that Florida was called so because of its fun, larger-than-life way of living, because of Miami's influential LGBT community, maybe because of the manatees that sway gently in the warm waters off Tampa, or because of Orlando's exciting, kid-friendly amusement parks. My stupidity got me a lot of eye rolls. A 'Swing State' is one that might vote either way in an American election (Democrat or Republic). Maybe the locals are too busy having fun and making the most of Florida's sunny demeanour to bother with political favouritism. We know there is enough reason to!

MIAMI

1 TRAWL FOR ART

The **Wynwood Art District** is the geographical equivalent of an LSD trip. It's an urban *Alice in Wonderland* set, an industrial warehouse-filled landscape covered with wild and imaginative graffiti. Since 1999, the streets have been lined with artwork by some of the best contemporary graffiti artists in the world thanks to an initiative by famous property developer Tony Goldman, who owns large parts of the area and doesn't mind the paint. It still remains a warehouse district, but now also shares the honour of being Miami's art district, boasting a large number of galleries that come alive during Art Basel, the world's largest art festival. The district will also leave you spoilt for choice with its fun eating options!

● www.wynwoodmiami.com

2 GET SOME SUN

Miami's beaches (all of them more than meeting the minimum requirement of gorgeous white sand and blue waters) mean different things to different people. The most popular one is **South Beach**. Visit during the peak of Spring Break, and the beach is packed with students doing typical Spring-Breaky things, and the sidewalk is filled with fitness enthusiasts running, roller blading or cycling – after all, they've got to keep those bikini bods in shape. The city's architectural theme continues onto South Beach too, with its colourful Art Deco lifeguard stations, marvels in their own right. Once the sun sets, there's no reason to pack up and leave, as South Beach is one of the best spots from which to view Ocean Drive's glitzy neon. →

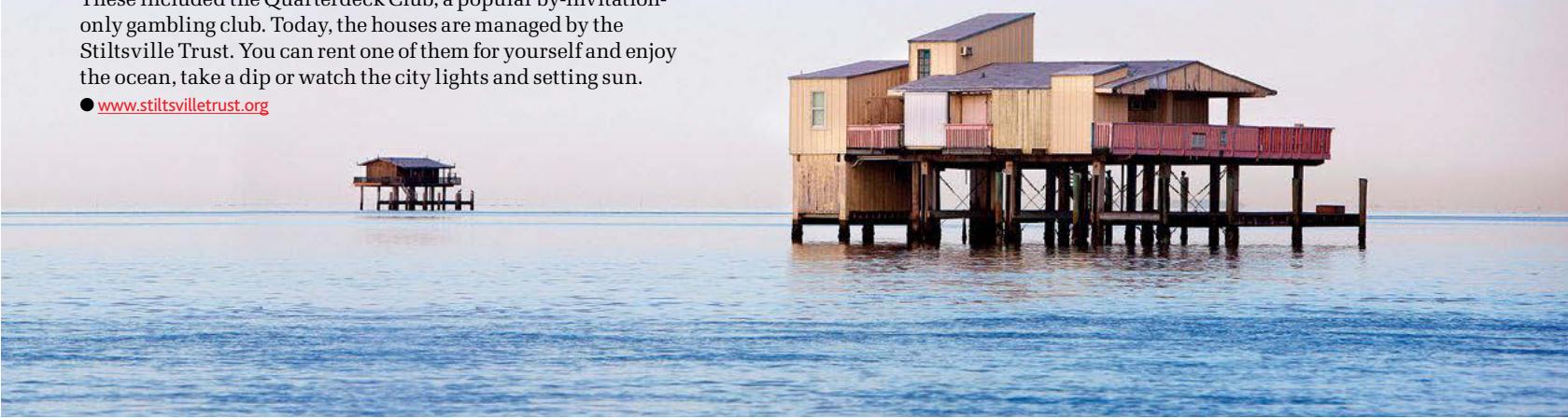
● www.miamibeaches.com



3 INDULGE IN SOME PORN

If 'ruin porn' is your thing, row your way to the Biscayne Channel in Biscayne National Park and visit **Stiltsville**. Seven empty shacks on stilts still stand in these shallow azure waters, and they come with urban legends in tow. Rumour has it that Stiltsville came into being in the 1930s, when one 'Crawfish' Eddie Walker built a shack on stilts to facilitate gambling. The tricky little bugger knew the law stated that gambling was only legal if it was one mile offshore. So he found a loophole – and some stilts – and the rest, as they say... His stilt house was also where he sweet-talked people into buying his special *chilau*, a crawfish chowder made from the fish he caught under his shack. Soon, the colony grew, and, at its peak, there were 27 structures playing host to Miami's vice lifestyle of the time. These included the Quarterdeck Club, a popular by-invitation-only gambling club. Today, the houses are managed by the Stiltsville Trust. You can rent one of them for yourself and enjoy the ocean, take a dip or watch the city lights and setting sun.

● www.stiltsvilletrust.org



4 HEAD TO CUBA

You hear the clatter and the loud Latin banter of multiple dominoes games before you see them at **Maximo Gomez Park** (801, SW 15th Ave; 9am–6pm) in **Calle Ocho**, also called Little Havana. Cuban men and women come to the park to play their daily game and shoot the breeze with their mates while sipping on strong espresso. Miami is home to a large number of Cubans – at one time, half of the city's population was Cuban – and the city's culture still retains that flavour. The area might have lost some of its old-world charm but still has its nuggets like the park and **El Titan de Bronze** (eltitancigars.com), a cigar shop that still makes them the old way. Don't miss mouth-watering *criollo*, country-style Cuban food at **El Pub**.

● El Pub: www.elpubcubancuisine.com; mains from ₹570

5 HIT THE STRIP

Vegas isn't the only place in 'murica with a strip. **Ocean Drive**, known affectionately among locals as The Strip, is the neon wonderland of the world's Art Deco capital: Miami. Every fashionable club or hotel in the city is here, and the **Miami Design Preservation League** does a number of interesting walks to explore it by, the most popular being the Art Deco Walking Tour. The road competes for space with al fresco dining tables, pimped-out cars cruising about, pedestrians who look like they fell off the pages of a *Vogue* summer edition and happy architecture buffs. But Ocean Drive donned many hats before it finally settled into its present-day avatar. During World War II, it was known as 'heaven's waiting room', home as it was to injured soldiers and pensioners waiting out their days. Then came the Colombian drug mafia, which turned the streets of the coastal town into the unwitting backdrop for the Cocaine Cowboy Wars in the late '70s. Luckily, the situation today isn't as grim, and you can walk about without (much) fear of getting shot.

● www.mdpl.org; 10.30am daily, also 6.30pm Thur; ₹1,600





TAMPA BAY AREA

6 TRAVEL IN TIME

If Miami has Calle Ocho, then Tampa has the National Historical District of **Ybor City**. The difference here is that the area has gone through a revival, yet remains culturally and socially relevant. Pronounced 'EE-bore', the city was home to several huge cigar factories and had a vast population of Cuban migrants in the 1880s. Where there are Cubans, a Cuban sandwich can't be far away. Get a true sense of its meaty history by chowing down at **Columbia Restaurant**, which has been around since 1905. A must-try here is the grilled Mahi Mahi Cubana, served with plantain chips.

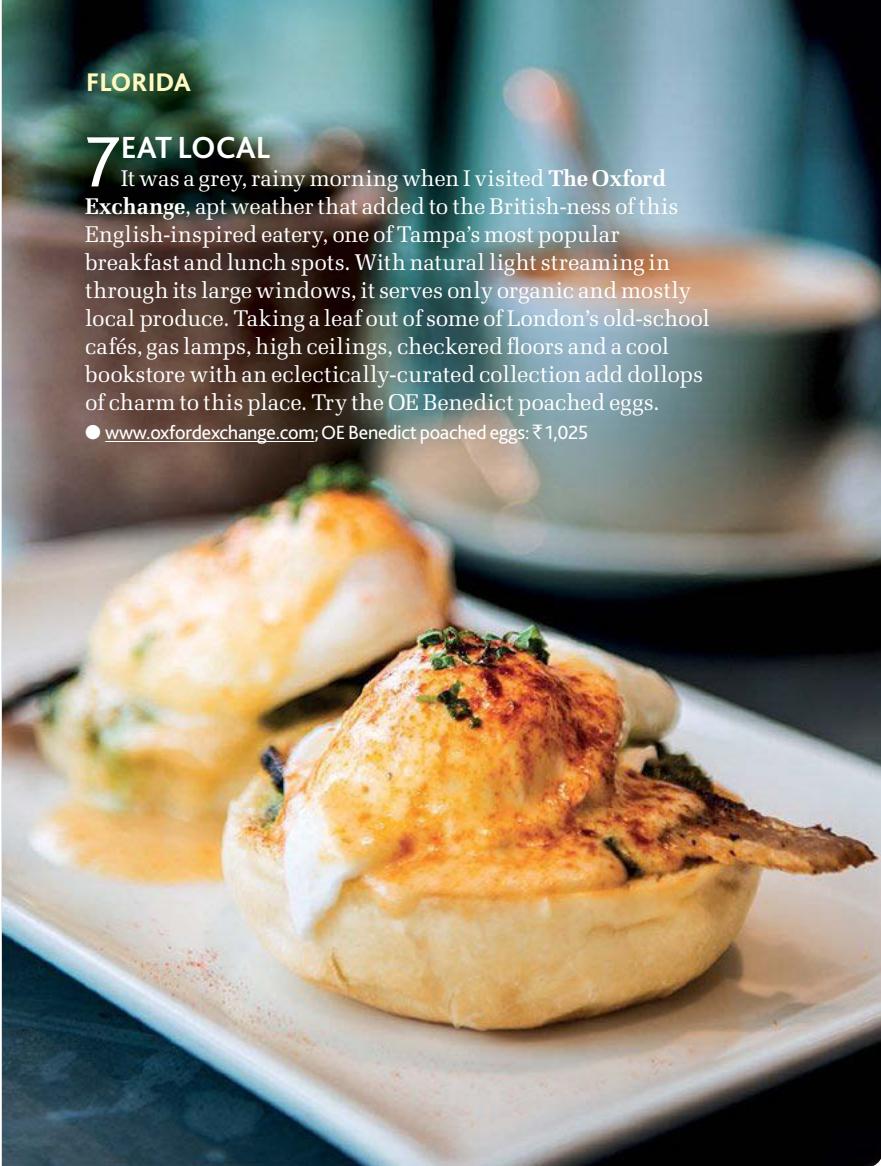
This quarter has also seen a nightlife revival, with several popular outdoor bars and restaurants springing up. The 'nightlife' tag is taken a little more literally by some at the nightclub called **The Castle**, home to Tampa's very own vampire and goth community. →

● www.yborcityonline.com; Columbia Restaurant: columbiarestaurant.com; Mahi Mahi Cubana: ₹ 765; The Castle: castleybor.com

7 EAT LOCAL

It was a grey, rainy morning when I visited **The Oxford Exchange**, apt weather that added to the British-ness of this English-inspired eatery, one of Tampa's most popular breakfast and lunch spots. With natural light streaming in through its large windows, it serves only organic and mostly local produce. Taking a leaf out of some of London's old-school cafés, gas lamps, high ceilings, checkered floors and a cool bookstore with an eclectically-curated collection add dollops of charm to this place. Try the OE Benedict poached eggs.

● www.oxfordexchange.com; OE Benedict poached eggs: ₹1,025

**8 MEET SOME MANATEES**

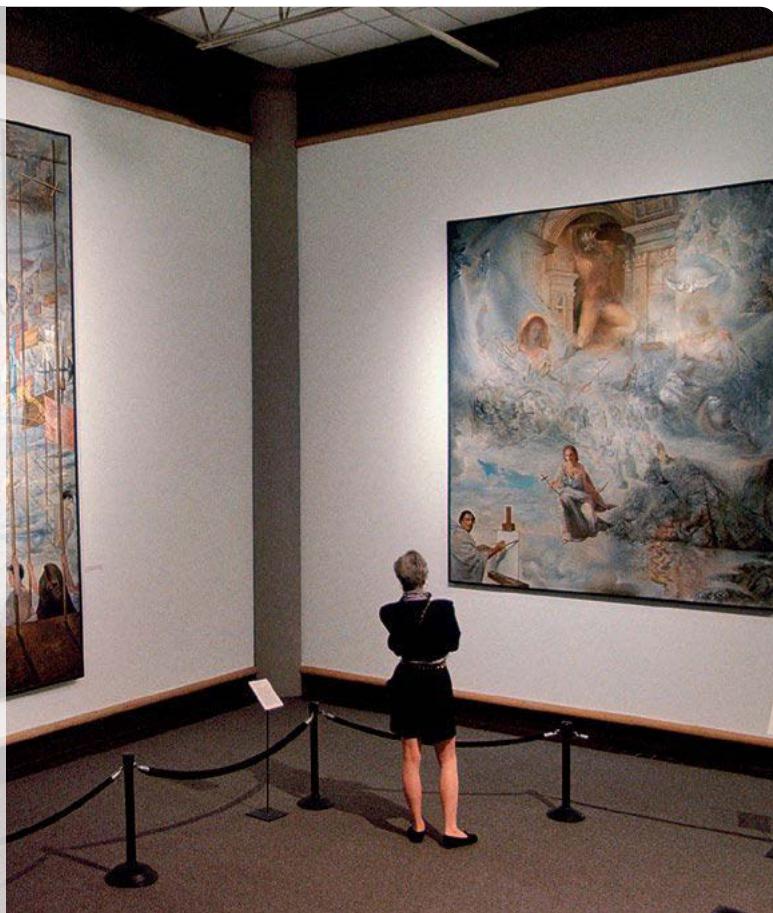
Happy accidents between man and nature fill us with warmth, and the story behind how the **Tampa Electric Manatee Viewing Center** came into being does precisely that. And no, this is *not* a tale of a robotic sea cow, as the name might suggest. Warm water discharged by the power plant began to attract these gentle giants, and it quickly became a hub for manatee-spotting. Large numbers of them (sea cows and humans) can now be seen when the surrounding waters become cold. The manatee might be the headlining act here, but you can also check out what it's like to be stuck in the middle of a storm in the hurricane simulator, or walk through the award-winning butterfly gardens here.

● www.tampaelectric.com/company/mvc; 10am–5pm

9 GET A FEEL FOR THE SURREAL

The master of surrealism is not the first thing people associate Florida with, but the **Dali Museum** in St Petersburg, Tampa, features the second-largest collection of his art outside Europe. The museum houses works from every period of the artist, and highlights include *Portrait of my Dead Brother* and the *The Average Bureaucrat*. The building itself is worth a gander, full of intriguing shapes and bits and bobs. Don't miss the helical staircase inside, a tribute to the artist's obsession with spirals and reminiscent of his rather whimsical yet wildly iconic moustache, we think.

● www.thedali.org; ₹1,535

**10 HEAD OUTSIDE**

Take in the great outdoors with a visit to the **Fort De Soto County Park**, where a bunch of activities will keep you on your toes, including camping, fishing, kayaking and cycling. The park is also a big draw for birders, with more than 328 species of birds calling it home. The best way to enjoy the park, though, is by doing nothing. Find yourself on **North Beach** (ranked one of the most beautiful beaches in the USA), dig your toes into the white sand and watch a flaming sun set into the ocean.

● www.pinellascounty.org; parking: ₹300

ORLANDO

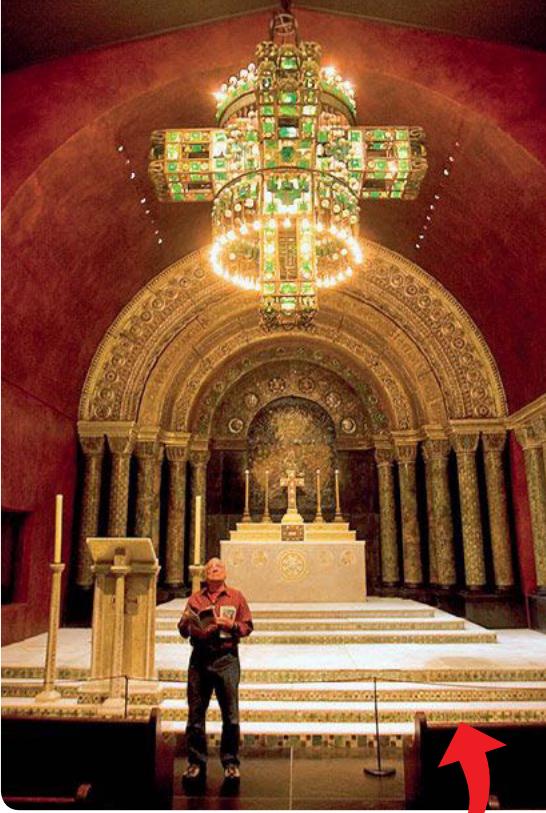
11 BE A WIZARD FOR A DAY

Every self-respecting Harry Potter fan will fall off their broomsticks when they visit Diagon Alley at **The Wizarding World of Harry Potter** in Universal Studios Florida. You'll have a hard time hanging on to your knuts (don't balk, it's Wizarding money), sickles and galleons here, with shops like the famous Ollivander's, where you can buy your own wand, and the Magical Menagerie, where you can pick up a feathered, furry or scaly friend to take home. If you're hungry, the Leaky Cauldron has all manner of British pub fare. There's even a ride inside Gringotts bank that will have you navigating your way through the perils of the goblin-run vaults. Looking for something a little more sinister? Practitioners of the Dark Arts will find whatever dastardly paraphernalia they need at the infamous Borgin and Burkes down Knockturn Alley!

● www.universalorlando.co.uk; two-park ticket for Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure from ₹ 13,500



PHOTOGRAPHS: © ACE FOTOSTOCK/ALAMY (MANATE); CORBIS (DALI MUSEUM, CHARLES HOSMER MORSE MUSEUM); © STEPHEN SERRIE/ALAMY (UNIVERSAL STUDIOS); HASHIM BADANI (OXFORD EXCHANGE)



12 BE A CULTURE-VULTURE

If the worlds of Disney and Universal Studios don't whet your cultural appetite, make your way to the small town of Winter Park and **The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art**. The museum is home to an astounding collection of the works of Louis Comfort Tiffany. Among other things, Tiffany was famous for beautiful stained and leaded glasswork, and the museum houses the largest collection of the same in the world. It is also home to the Tiffany Chapel, a Byzantine-inspired design that wows visitors with its incredible details and the way the light filters in through the stained-glass windows.

● www.morsemuseum.org; ₹ 300

13 WALK THE WALK

The biggest draw to **Disney's Boardwalk** is how un-Disney like it is. This quarter-mile promenade around Crescent Lake has a very 1920s-era Atlantic City Boardwalk or Coney Island feel, and offers an escape from the frenetic vibe of the surrounding amusement parks. Being under the Disney umbrella, there is obviously enough to keep kids amused (like the interactive LEGO exhibits), but adults haven't been forgotten. The Boardwalk is popular with grown-ups for its chilled-out entertainment and nightlife spots, while shops like the Ghiradelli Ice Cream store are a hit with all age groups. →



THE FLORIDA KEYS

14 GO ROAD-TRIPPIN'

The mother of all Florida road trips is along the **Overseas Highway** heading down to Key West. Do it in a convertible with the roof down, or on a Harley, whichever makes you feel more bad-ass. This journey is all about the pit-stops – the road takes you over the sea and across islands, and there are photo-ops galore. And since you're in the Keys, there's no way to ignore Key Lime Pie – sample your first one at **Mrs Mac's Kitchen**. But the highlight of this journey remains the **Seven Mile Bridge**. It's what your journey has been building up to – seascapes you have only ever seen on postcards and taken for granted as being 'photoshopped' suddenly greet you in the flesh, and, boy, is it exhilarating!

● Rent a car from Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise: from ₹ 2,200/day or a bike from Harley Davidson (harley-davidson.com; from ₹ 6,500/day); Mrs Mac's Kitchen: www.mrsmacskitchen.com; ₹ 300



15 HEAD HOME

Author **Ernest Hemingway's Home**, now a museum, on Key West could just as well qualify as a Japanese cat café (over 40 to 60 of them live here), though there is more reason to visit. Key West has always been a draw for the slightly eccentric, Ernest Hemingway being the most popular of them. This limestone home, which still has the original furniture, is surrounded by lush gardens that house a fountain made out of a bar urinal. Popular books such as *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *To Have and Have Not* were written during his time here.

● www.hemingwayhome.com, entry from ₹ 830





16 DIVE UNDER

The gorgeous views over land are only half the story. The other half lies beneath the surface. **Key Largo** lays claim to the title 'diving capital of the world', and we reckon it's not an exaggeration. There's something on the menu for every kind of diver. The **John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park** is great for wreck diving, while **Tavernier**, from where you access Conch Reef, is where you go to drift dive. **Looe Key** (urge to insert pun suppressed) is the jewel in the crown. The underwater landscape here rises and falls and is home to a rich variety of coral, fish and eels and it's great for snorkelling as well. Once you're done getting wet, indulge your geeky side at the **Florida Keys History of Diving Museum**, which is full of diving equipment and stories from a bygone era.

● John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park: www.pennekamppark.com; certified divers: ₹ 4,785 / two dives, instruction courses from ₹ 11,800; Florida Keys History of Diving Museum: divingmuseum.org; ₹ 765

PHOTOGRAPHS: CORBIS (BOTH IMAGES)

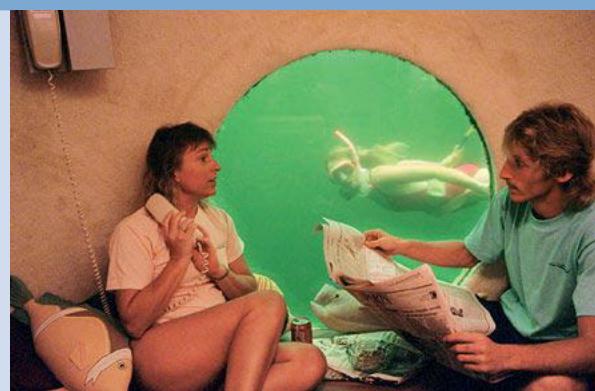
17 GET A DRINK

Set yourself up for a little treasure hunt by trying to find your way to **No Name Pub**, a bar that prides itself for being "a nice place, if you can find it." Don't worry, you *will* eventually get there. It's hidden behind banana trees on land that's also home to the endangered miniature Key deer (don't be surprised if one pops by to say hello). Enter the pub, and the treasure is in plain sight. Thousands of scribbled dollar bills hang from the walls and ceilings of this old school pub (in the region of \$90,000, it is said). The tradition of hanging dollar bills began back in the 1970s, when the Keys had gads of illegal money floating through, thanks to a thriving marijuana trade. Curb the temptation to pocket a few and make a grand escape – we don't think the owners will take too kindly to that. Instead, take a seat at the creaky bar counter and wolf down a few slices of the pizza that it's famous for. ● www.nonamepub.com; pizzas from ₹ 765

18 RENT AN ISLAND OR DIVE TO YOUR ROOM

Ever dreamed of escaping to a desolate island so that you wouldn't have to deal with annoying people only to have to dump the idea because you are too attached to your creature comforts? **Pretty Joe Rock** might just be the answer you've been looking for. This cosy island has a house in the Keys available on rent. Your two-bedroom house offers 360° views of the Gulf of Mexico, and a jacuzzi to sit in and take in the views from. Expect an occasional visit from the dolphins while you sit on your deck!

If even an island isn't isolated enough for you, consider **Jules Undersea Lodge**. The only way to access your room is by diving 21 feet underwater through the Emerald Lagoon. The only experience of its kind in the world, Jules Undersea Lodge is where science fiction meets reality. If you're feeling too lazy to prepare your own meals, a member of the lodge staff will deliver your food. Chomp on your meal and watch the fish visit from your window. → ● Pretty Joe Rock: www.vrbo.com/187021; ₹ 2,55,000 / week for a two-bedroom house and boat; Jules Undersea Lodge: jul.com; from ₹ 51,000, group of three to four: ₹ 22,360 / person





THE EVERGLADES

19 HIT THE 'GLADES

There are a number of ways to see these tropical wetlands, and, while the flat-bottomed airboat is the most popular, I preferred the pole boat and kayak tours offered by **Everglades Adventure Tours**. Pole boats have been the traditional choice of commute through centuries by the Native Indian tribes. The slow pace allows you to take in the sights of this national park and get close to the marine life residing in these marshes.

● www.evergladesadventuretours.net; ₹4,400

20 GET A NOSE-FULL

The Himalayas have the Yeti, the forests of North America have Big Foot and the Everglades have the Skunk Ape. The Skunk Ape is a large, hairy, bipedal mammal (some would say that about me, but never mind *that*), said to be about six or seven feet tall. The creature gets its name from the, umm... smell it emits, from all that living out in the parts filled with swamp gas. Curiosity to learn more about this creature led Dave Sheal and his brother to establish the **Skunk Ape Research Headquarters**. More touristy-hub, less research-centre, it remains a fun and quirky thing to do while down in the Big Cypress National Preserve.

● www.skunkape.info

21 TASTE THE SWAMP

Joanie's Blue Crab Café does its own version of a meal combi. It's called a Swamp Combo. What does the Swamp Combo consist of, you ask? It includes two frog legs, 'gator nuggets, crab cakes and Native American fry bread with Joanie's famous salsa and a side of coleslaw. Other popular swamp meats include catfish, grouper and soft shell crabs. This simple-looking café can be found in a red barn just around the corner from the USA's tiniest post office, and doubles up as a popular local live-music venue. Eat your meal on the patio while you take in the great outdoors of the Everglades (but watch out for those 'gators!).

● www.joaniebluecrabcafe.com; Swamp Combo: ₹1,085



Make it Happen: Florida

Essentials

► BEST TIME TO VISIT

Depending on where you're going, you can visit Florida at any time. Summers (May–Sept) are hot, humid and wet. Book well in advance if you're visiting during Spring Break (Mar–Aug), and be prepared to jostle for space at the beaches and theme parks. June to November is hurricane season, and the shoulder seasons (Mar–May, Oct–Nov) tend to be best, with cool, pleasant weather.

► GETTING THERE

We flew Virgin Atlantic from Mumbai to Miami, which is best connected to Indian cities (return fares from ₹ 91,000). Other airlines that fly to Miami are Lufthansa, United Airlines, Delta, Air France and Swiss (from ₹ 78,000 return).

► GETTING AROUND

Travelling by car is the best way to get to your different stops, as public transport may not get you everywhere. Miami has a range of car rental options, from Alamo to Hertz (from ₹ 2,000/ day), if you're looking for cheaper rentals, Car Rental Express compares and lists rates for local agencies (currental express.com; rentals from ₹ 500/ day).

►

You can apply for a B-2 visitor visa from the American Visa Application centre. Processing typically takes three working days, while appointment wait times are around 15 working days (www.ustraveldocs.com/in/in-niv-visaapply.asp; ₹ 10,560).

►

Consulate General of India, Atlanta: www.indianconsulateatlanta.org

► CURRENCY

USD 1 = ₹ 64

► FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Discover Florida* and the tourism board's website, visitflorida.com, are packed with information.

► VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Bombay Darbar's menu has all the usual suspects. It's known for its quick service and tandoori chicken (00-1-305-444-7272; bombaydarbarrestaurant.com; 2901, Florida Ave, Miami; mains from ₹ 825).



3 WAYS TO DO FLORIDA

	MIAMI	TAMPA	ORLANDO
STAY	Hotel Breakwater, located right in the heart of Miami's Ocean Drive, boasts a rich history as well as some of best nightlife Miami has to offer (00-1-305-532-2362; www.breakwaterhotelsouthbeach.com , info@breakwatersouthbeach.com ; South Beach, 940, Ocean Drive, Miami Beach; from ₹ 7,500).	In historic South Tampa, the Epicurean hotel's bright and tasteful rooms, brilliant food and service will make you completely ignore the smoking hole in your pocket (00-1-813-999-8700; www.epicureanhotel.com ; 1207, South Howard Ave; from ₹ 11,425).	The white-walled Alford Inn at Rollins College is an extension of Winter Park's elegance and artistic traditions (00-1-407-998-8090; www.thealfondinn.com ; 300, East New England Ave, Winter Park; from ₹ 11,425).
SHOPPING	GOOD TO KNOW		
	Pick up a Cuban (cigar, that is) at El Titan Bronze (00-1-305-860-1412; www.eltitancigars.com ; 1071, SW 8th St; from ₹ 300).		
	A good way to get around South Beach is by renting bicycles from Deco Bike Tours (www.decobike.com ; first 30 min free, hourly rental passes from ₹ 385).		



READER
SOURCED!

SO FAR AWAY

A little-explored destination off the coasts of Australia and Indonesia, Papua New Guinea is worth discovering



WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS: **SUBIR GHOSH**

THE azure Pacific Ocean below us is dotted with deep green specks, ringed by bright yellow, creamy sand and surf, all glistening in the afternoon sun: we have reached Papua New Guinea (PNG). It is a group of about 600 islands, located in the south-west Pacific Ocean, just above Australia and with its western edge close to Indonesia. Its only contact with the outside world is through the capital city, Port Moresby. After being ruled temporarily by the Germans and British, Papua New Guinea finally ceased to be an Australian colony and became

independent in 1975. Its seven million inhabitants, consisting of about 600 tribes, speak nearly 800 different languages. Luckily, everybody also converses in Tok Pisin or Pidgin English on Port Moresby, and we are able to communicate comfortably.

A scientist by profession, Subir Ghosh enjoys travelling to destinations that are considered slightly off-beat. He visited PNG as part of a trip to Australia. He is a regular contributor to *Lonely Planet Magazine India's Postcards section*, and has also contributed a Photo Story to the magazine.





We were in a small boat near Mioko Island (of the Duke of York group of islands), when, all of a sudden, there were big smiles all around. The 200-strong pod of resident spinner dolphins was showing off all its tricks: riding the bow-waves of our boat in groups, jumping cleanly out of the water, and diving back. I was taken back to my childhood comic book-reading days where Phantom and his family played with Solomon and Nefertiti, their pet dolphins →

PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN PHOTOS

Pigeon Island, part of the Credner Islands group in East New Britain Province, is a paradise for snorkellers. Our very knowledgeable guide Jackson Pinea was surprised when we asked to use the changing rooms, since the only inhabitants of the islet were a group of birds! The coral reef under the sea was a riot of colour and teeming with life



When we visited, it was election time in PNG. The country has a multi-party political system, with 111 parliamentary seats. We got a unique taste of the ethnic and cultural diversity of PNG in Port Moresby. Under a marquee in a large ground, the campaign was in full swing. The whole ground was chock-a-block with many groups of islanders, each dressed in gorgeous costumes, with brightly-painted faces, singing and dancing with musical instruments. If only the Indian electioneering process were like this!





The Raggiana bird of paradise, or *kumul*, is PNG's national bird and features on the national emblem and flag. The national rugby team is nicknamed the Kumuls as well. The males are famous for their fascinating courtship display. There are four varieties of Raggiana, each with different colours. The birds are sought after for their lush plumage, which is used to decorate ceremonial headdresses. Luckily, the cropping of feathers is not fatal. We saw this magnificent bird in a captive breeding location run by the government. →

PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN PHOTOS

Mount Tavurvur is the most active volcano of the Rabaul Caldera in the Gazelle Peninsula. In a major eruption in 1994, it completely destroyed Rabaul, one of PNG's most important cities, and woke up again last year – August 2014, to be exact. The island is stark, the soil is loose and blackish in colour from the volcanic ash, and devoid of vegetation, in contrast with the surrounding greenery. The red comes from sulphur deposits. The hot springs are scalding and you could boil megapode eggs in them – these resident birds bury their eggs deep inside the hot soil, which acts as an incubator. The local people collect these eggs – in limited numbers – since they are a delicacy



We spent a day and night at a homestay on Mioko Island. There was no electricity and the villagers collected rainwater for drinking, but the island had a primary school and all residents understood and used Tok Pisin. The people were so friendly and sociable that we instantly became like one of theirs: my son played football with the local children and we mingled with the villagers. The children especially had fluffy, curly blond hair that was striking against their dark skin. Each of us received gifts of small- and medium-sized bags, made from pandanus leaves, which the village ladies crafted right in front of us. When we left the next day, nearly the entire village came to the shore to wave goodbye





The Victoria crowned pigeon, named after the British monarch, is a large, land-dwelling bird. Each can weigh up to 3.5kg. Unfortunately, this majestic bird has become very rare in the wild (although very popular in captivity) due to hunting and loss of habitat, and is rated Vulnerable on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) Red List of Threatened Species. We saw it on a visit to the captive breeding centre



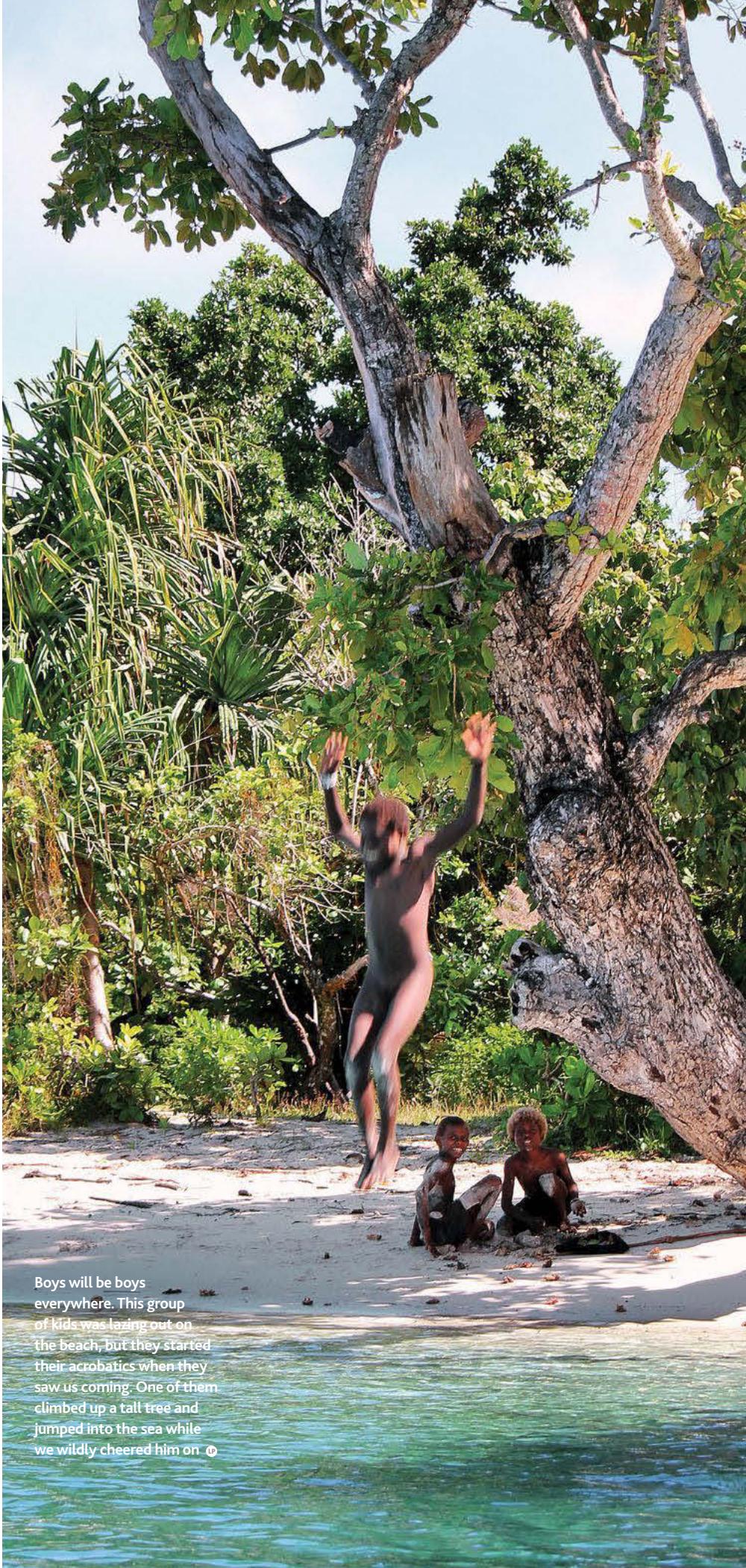
These outrigger canoes seemed to glide over the shimmering, crystal-clear waters here. Used by villagers for transport and fishing, these boats have a lateral wooden structure rigged to the main body, mainly to lend them more stability. Simione, our host in Mioko Village on Mioko Island, took us for a canoe ride on the sea →

These fascinating spinner dolphins, are, as their name suggests, famous for their awesome aerial acrobatics. We saw plenty of them, jumping out of the water, performing spins – they can apparently do up to seven revolutions! – and tail-spins and diving back under. It is thought that these spins are possibly a form of communication used by this highly-social species



This man was one of the members of the election-campaigning group that came to Port Moresby. Dressed in traditional clothes, they carried weapons like bows and arrows and axes while dancing, and urged us with welcoming smiles to join them in their dancing. We were freely moving about taking photos, smiling back at the groups, and, surprisingly, never felt any uneasiness or insecurity while moving within the vast, different-looking mass





Boys will be boys everywhere. This group of kids was lazing out on the beach, but they started their acrobatics when they saw us coming. One of them climbed up a tall tree and jumped into the sea while we wildly cheered him on. IP

Make it Happen

Essentials

► BEST TIME TO VISIT

Papua New Guinea is best visited between May and October, when it's dry and cool and festival time. There otherwise tends to be quite a lot of rain.

► GETTING THERE

You'll fly multiple airlines with generally two stopovers through Southeast Asia (Singapore, Manila or Hong Kong) and Australia (generally Brisbane). Jet Airways, Singapore Airlines, Virgin Australia and Air Niugini fly from Mumbai and New Delhi to Port Moresby (*return fares from ₹ 90,000*). Air Niugini, the country's national airline, has direct flights to Port Moresby from Singapore.

► GETTING AROUND

There is local transport (air or boat) between some islands, but, in our case, all transport was included in the package. We travelled with the Australian company **Getaway Trekking and Adventures**, which we found on the internet, and was helpful and reliable. There are plenty of other operators, and it's best to contact a few with an outline of your requirements and interests and see which one can best tailor a package for you (*Getaway Trekking and Adventures: 00-61-3-9762-2944; getawaytrekking.com.au*).

►

Apply for a visitor visa at the Papua New Guinea High Commission in New Delhi. The visa is free and takes approximately three working days to process (www.pnghcdelhi.in).

►

High Commission of India, Port Moresby: www.hcipom.gov.in

► CURRENCY

Papua New Guinean Kina 1 = ₹ 23.4

► FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands* guide and the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority's website (papuanewguinea.travel), has tonnes of useful information and links.

► VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Tasty Bite comes recommended for its Indian fare and has plenty of vegetarian options (00-675-3212-222; **ANG House, Ground Floor, Hunter St, opp Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port Moresby**).

STAY & EAT

Our travel package included all meals and accommodation. You can try the following options:

Raintree Lodge: 00-675-323-8888; www.theraintreelodge.com; admin@theraintreelodge.com; Section 39, Lot 7, Ilimo Ave, Boroko, Port Moresby; from ₹ 11,600

Kokopo Beach Bungalow Resort: 00-675-982-8788; kbb.com.pg; kokopobeachbungalow@global.net.pg; 1, Kurur St, Kokopo; from ₹ 13,000

OF PALLADIO, PROSECCO & POLENTA &

North Italy's Veneto region has more than a few aces up its sleeve
– Palladian masterpieces, fascinating towns and incredible food
that isn't all pizza and pasta

WORDS NADEZNA SIGANPORIA





BEYOND
THE CITIES
from
Venice

GNOCHI and I, we've developed a relationship. I've discovered an abiding love for eating these little dumplings, and I've also discovered the simple joy to be had in saying the word 'gnocchi'. It could be because I have a steaming plateful in front of me, and I'm looking out at the most beautiful views – water that's the deepest blue meeting rolling green hills, boats of varying sizes bobbing away in the harbour, medieval lake villages dominated by impressive castles in the distance. Life is good.

I've walked the porticoed streets of Padua, taken a cable car up to Monte Baldo, stared in awe at the Teatro Olimpico, sampled fantastic grappa, dined in a castle... all in the quieter region of Veneto. Its towns and cities have a lot in common; with a shared history and similar architecture, it's easy to mistake one for the other. But each also has something unique to offer. Vicenza, though not the birthplace of Palladio, is definitely his town; Bassano is known for superb grappa; the ancient walled town of Marostica has a live chess game held every alternate year; Treviso, with its water canals, feels like a quieter Venice; Verona is famous for the Roman Arena and Juliet's home; Padua's Cappella degli Scrovegni has lovely frescoes to gawk at. And while Lake Como seems to be on most itineraries, the picturesque villages that surround Lake Garda are equally interesting. →

Lake Garda and the towns that surround it are just as lovely as the more famous Lake Como

PHOTOGRAPH: © LOOK DIE BILDAGENTUR DER FOTOGRAFEN GMBH/ ALAMY



Lake Garda

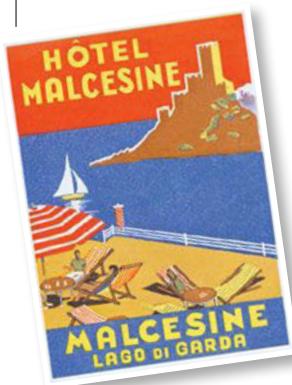
Venice to Malcesine: 179km

I'm in the utterly romantic town of **Malcesine** on the shores of Lake Garda. The lake – the largest in Italy – has a lot to see and do around it, but, for now, it's the eastern shore in the Verona Province that's on the list, and, because I can't resist its charms, there's a quick visit to the southern tip for **Sirmione** in the Brescia Province as well.

Malcesine is to be my base for the next couple of days, and I can't wait to go exploring. I'm told that I have to start at the most important place here, the **Castello Scaligero** (information for all sights on the *Make it Happen* pages). The castle gets its name from the Scaliger family, who owned it, and even rebuilt it in the 14th century. There's an interesting **Museum of Natural History**, which covers the Monte Baldo and Lake Garda region, housed within it, and the view from the very top is plain spectacular. The castle, along with the **Palazzo dei Capitani**, a 14th-century Venetian palace built by the same family on Roman ruins, are the two major attractions of the town. But it's the cable-car ride up to the summit of **Monte Baldo** that is the absolute highlight for me. This area is famous for its extra virgin olive oil, and the **Consorzio Olivicoltori di Malcesine**, a consortium where oil is produced using the olives harvested in the region, offers tours and tastings so you can sample some.

From Malcesine, it's a short bus ride south to another medieval town, **Torri del Benaco**. Quite similar in history and appearance to Malcesine, it's a lot smaller and attracts fewer crowds. Torri also has a **Castello Scaligero**, which was rebuilt in 1383.

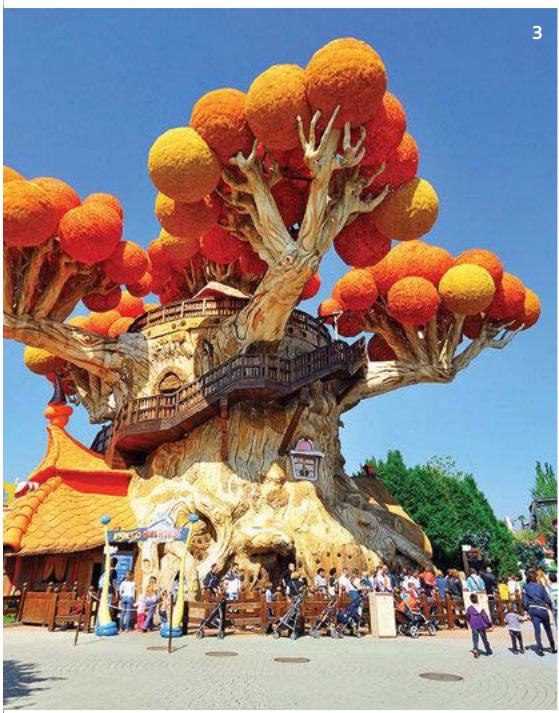
The best thing to do in Torri is walk the narrow, cobblestoned alleys that wind their way through town, and lazily explore its charms'



The West Tower is actually part of the original castle, which dates back to the 10th century, and it's a great place from which to take in the town and the lake. The best thing to do here is walk the narrow, cobblestoned alleys that wind their way through town, and lazily explore its charms. On this walk, I find myself a cosy waterfront eatery where I get my first taste of polenta. One of the traditional dishes here, polenta is a creamy, flavour-packed porridge of sorts, made from locally-grown cornmeal. Even though it's served as a side to my pike in anchovy sauce, it really does steal the show.

A great way to travel between towns is to use the ferry service. It's efficient, convenient and another wonderful way to experience Lake Garda. **Sirmione**, which is at the southern tip of the lake, is my next destination. Located on the peninsula that juts out of the southern shore into the lake, Sirmione is so beautiful, it's almost surreal. From the mainland, you enter the peninsula via a narrow bridge across a moat, passing under the portcullis of the castle walls. The **Rocca Scaligera**, an enormous castle built by the Scaligeri, is also where you should start your exploration. It's quite a climb to the top of the tower, but, when you look out over the expansive turquoise blue waters, you'll be glad you did it.

At the other end of the peninsula (which isn't too far a walk) is the **Grotte di Catullo**, the ruins of a 1st-century private Roman villa spread out over two hectares. Sirmione is famed for its thermal springs; end your time here at **Aquaria**. Lazing in a thermal pool by the lake, I can think of few better ways to end a day spent tramping about. →



1. Castello Scaligero dominates the Malcesine skyline
2. The Veneto region abounds with classical artwork, like this statue in Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico
3. If you have the time, visit the Gardaland theme park for a different twist to your trip
4. You'll be hard-pressed to find ruins – these are of an ancient Roman villa – in more beautiful surrounds
5. The beach and promenade at Torri del Benaco is full of sun-lovers in summer

Facing page:

1. You'll want to spend hours ambling along the shores of Lake Garda
2. The cable-car ride up to the top of Monte Baldo from Malcesine affords gorgeous views





1. Teatro Olimpico and its grand proscenium (the area that surrounds the stage)
2. Rent a bicycle and make your way around Bassano del Grappa
3. This villa is one of the many fine examples of Palladian architecture that you will find in and around Vicenza
4. Pick a café, get yourself a treat and settle down to a spot of people watching
5. Vicenza's bustling square has plenty to see and do

Facing page:

1. The Alpini Bridge is Bassano del Grappa's centrepiece
2. Head to Grapperia Nardini for your first taste of *grappa*
3. The gorgeous ceramics you get at Bassano del Grappa make for great take-homes





1

Vicenza

Distance from Venice: 75km

If it's a Thursday and you're in Vicenza, chances are you'll catch colourful stalls in the **Piazza dei Signori**. The Old Town's main market square is lined with cafés, *trattorias* and bars, but it's the weekly flea market, packed with bargain goodies and delicious local produce, that really interests me. It's a wonderful juxtaposition of trivial trinkets against the backdrop of some truly noteworthy Renaissance-era architecture.

Standing in the middle of the square, in front of the **Basilica Palladiana**, with the **Torre di Piazza** bell tower, the **Loggia del Capitanato** and the **Palazzo del Monte di Pieta** with the **Church of San Vincenzo** around it, I can picture what it would have been like a few centuries ago. One of the most historically- and architecturally-significant buildings here, the basilica still houses luxury goldsmith stores, and the upper galleries and Grand Hall host exhibitions.

Vicenza is so much more than a day-trip from Venice. Located between the Berici and Lessini peaks, it's had a disrupted history, though it flourished through Venetian rule – partly because of its strategic location, mostly due to its biggest claim to fame, Andrea Palladio. It isn't the least bit surprising that the town is dominated by its most famous citizen. Soon, I'm pretty sick of hearing his name, but, to his credit, Andrea Palladio didn't just change the face of the Veneto region; he was one of the most influential architects to come out of Europe at the time. Any modern building trying to look impressive and formal will have these Neo-Classical elements: the pillars, the triangular roofs, the domes and cupolas...

In Vicenza, 23 of his buildings and a collection of villas have made their way onto the UNESCO World Heritage list. You should start at the impressive **Teatro Olimpico** for its *trompe l'oeil* stage backdrop depicting

*Bassano
del Grappa
is very proud
of her history.
If you listen
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I'm told,
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to you,
whispering
tales from
her past'*



3

the seven streets of Thebes. Located inside the **Palazzo del Territorio**, the elliptical theatre is said to be the oldest covered theatre in existence. Classic Roman and Greek styles greatly influenced the design, seen in the marvellous columns and high reliefs, but the wonder here is how he played with light and shadow. The **Palazzo Chiericati**, a home that looks more like a Roman palace, is close by. Today, it houses the **The Civic Art Gallery** and its wonderful art collection. Don't miss the 13th-century **Chiesa di Santa Corona** (Church of the Holy Crown), which has a marvellous painting by Bellini, and the **Palladio Museum**, housed in the richly-styled **Palazzo Barbarano**. And while you're at it, make a trip to the **Villa Valmarana 'Ai Nani'**, so called because of the *nani*, or dwarf sculptures, that line the wall, and **Villa La Rotonda**, Palladio's most famous villa. It's not just for the architecture that they're worth visiting – don't miss the paintings, chandeliers and stucco decorations that adorn them.

Bassano del Grappa

Distance from Venice: 95km

PICTURE a medieval European town with a wooden bridge and pastel-hued townhouses lining cobblestoned alleys, market squares surrounded by ancient restored buildings, quaint open-air cafés and quiet stores tucked away into little nooks. This is the wonderful picture that will pop up every time I think of my time in Italy. Bassano del Grappa is very proud of her history, and, I'm told if you listen very carefully, she'll talk to you, whispering tales from her past.

A walk down **Viale dei Martiri** (martyrs' boulevard), a manicured tree-lined street that looks out onto Brenta Valley, is the way to go. The boulevard is dedicated →



to 31 partisans who were hung by Nazis in Bassano, some from the very trees that line the street. It's said that this boulevard was chosen so that any remaining partisans hiding in the valley would have a clear view of the fate that awaited them. You can see evidence of the war at the **Ponte Vecchio**, or **Alpini Bridge**, as well. The buildings that flank the bridge still have bullet holes in them, but it's the bridge itself that's remarkable.

Alpini Bridge is the symbol of the town and another example of Palladio's genius. The original was always getting flooded and breaking away. Palladio designed a trussed-roofed bridge using wood, making it more flexible to withstand the force of the Brenta River.

This town is known today for one very important reason – grappa. It's a reason that makes me smile, and, if, like me, you're not used to it, walk a little funny after a few shots. Distilled from the remains of grape skins, grappa is a potent spirit usually had as an *apéritif*, and the **Grapperia Nardini** is the perfect place to sample a few. For a guided tour to understand the process, head to **Poli Distillery**.

Once the grappa wears off, make a trip to nearby **Marostica**. This tiny town has an amusing story attached to it. Legend has it that, in 1454, two noblemen fell in love with the daughter of the lord of the castle. Not wanting to shed blood in a duel, the lord decided the two should play a game of chess; the winner got his daughter's hand, the loser walked away with...well, her beautiful younger sister. Of course, the live chess game was carried out with all the pomp of the time, and today, a festival called **La Partita a Scacchi di Marostica** is held every other September, complete with a live chess game, medieval costumes and parade.

Back in Bassano, take it easy. Stroll around the historic centre, visit the *piazzas* and the Venetian-styled arched streets. Stop by the stores selling gorgeous ceramics. Rent a bicycle and go for a ride in the beautiful countryside – it's all there for the taking.

What makes Padua so different from other towns in the region is its energetic vibe. The buildings are old and magnificent, the people young and playful'



Padua

Distance from Venice: 48km

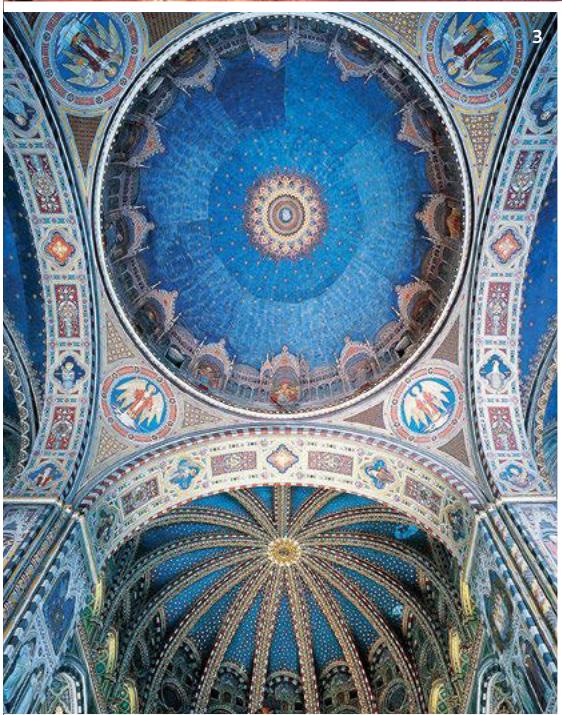
PADUA really knows how to hold its own among Italy's bigger guns. The city has an interesting vibe; just walk into the famous **Caffe Pedrocchi** for some people-watching and you'll get what I mean.

Since it opened its doors in 1831, the café is famous not only for coffee, but also for being the place where revolutionary ideas were born, especially during the Italian Risorgimento (when the country was unified).

The **Prato della Valle**, an elliptical 'square' that's one of the largest in Italy, is also great for people-watching. The site of a former Roman arena, the oval garden is surrounded by a water channel lined with 78 statues of historical figures and famous Paduans. It's a relatively peaceful walk through the garden, though I can't help but wish I had thought of packing a picnic. I'm baffled that the town doesn't figure on standard Italian itineraries, until I'm distracted by the next wonder here, the **Orto Botanico**. One of the oldest botanical gardens in Europe and Padua's only UNESCO World Heritage listing, the garden has remained practically unaltered since its opening in 1545.

What makes Padua so different from other towns in the region is its energetic vibe. The buildings are old and magnificent, the people young and playful. This is because of the 60,000-odd students that attend the prestigious **University of Padua**. You might think touring a school would be mind-numbing until you enter the main building, housed in the **Palazzo del Bò**. The gallery, decorated with almost 3,000 coats of arms added over the centuries, is definitely worth a visit.

The **Basilica di Sant'Antonio** is one of Padua's biggest attractions. Dedicated to Saint Antony, the intricate sculptures and delicate frescoes are definitely worth waiting in line for, even if you don't know the religious significance of this place. It's the Saint's Tomb and →



1 & 3. While gawking at its marvellous architecture, don't miss seeing the remains of St Antony when you visit Basilica di Sant'Antonio in Padua

2. The Orto Botanico houses over 3,500 plant species from all corners of the world

4. The Prato della Valle just calls for a picnic lunch

5. The water channel and statues that surround the Prato della Valle

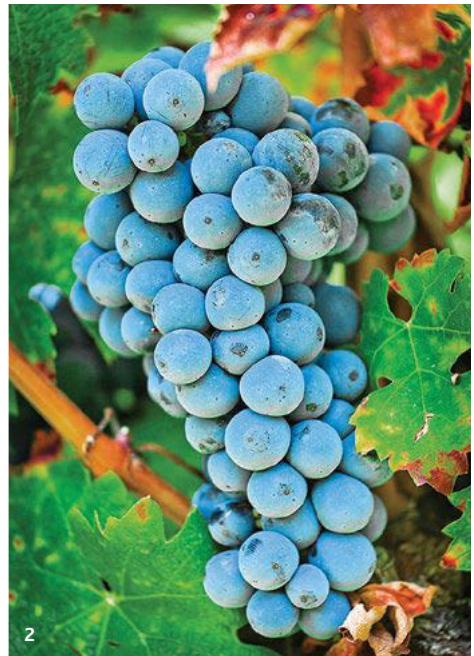
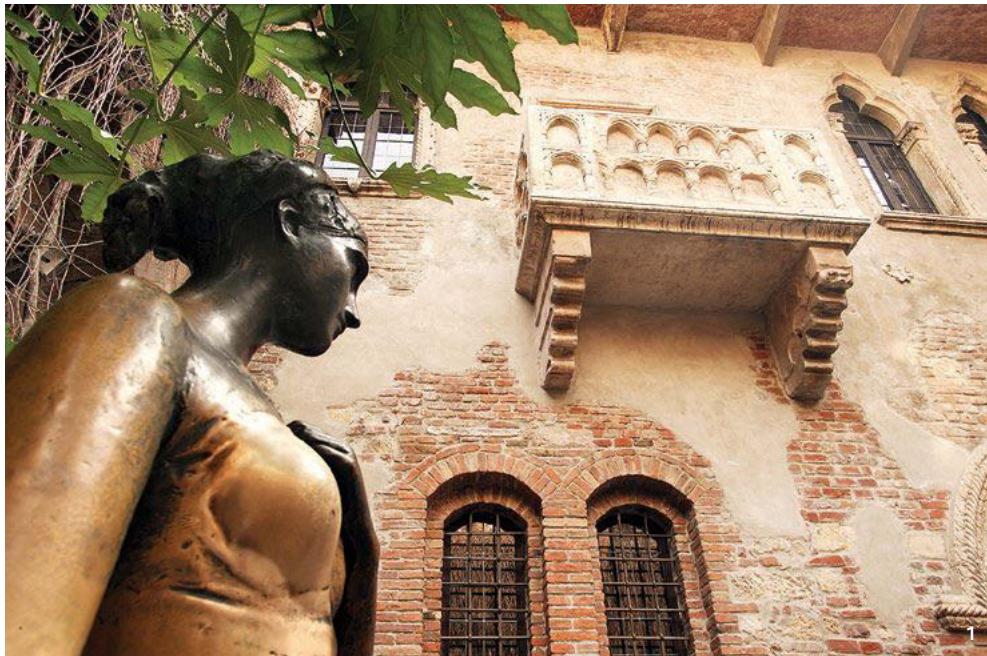
Facing page:

1. Idle conversation at curbside cafés is a common sight across Italy

2. Bassano del Grappa is full of places you can catch a quiet moment at

3. You'll stumble across a beautiful piece of art at practically every corner in this part of Italy





Treasury Chapel that beckon those who do; here lie the preserved remains of St Anthony – his tongue, vocal chords and jaw bone!

Visit the quieter **Capella degli Scrovegni** for Giotto's incredible fresco cycle. The colourful frescoes show scenes from the life of Jesus, and significantly, Giotto was the first to depict him humanistically.

At the end of the day, I head back to the twin market squares of **Piazza delle Erbe** and **Piazza della Frutta** within the historic centre. This is where you should spend your evenings, lazing around in one of the cafés or strolling through the arcaded market held in the *loggia* of the **Palazzo della Ragione**, a Gothic-style palace that's always packed with Padua's youth.

Verona

Distance from Venice: 120km

IT'S ironic that **Casa di Giulietta** is packed with people waiting to rub the bronze statue of Juliet for good luck, though no one can tell me where the tales of its good fortune come from – as far as I remember, Juliet wasn't all that fortunate. It's ironic because the fictional Juliet never actually lived in the medieval house, which dates back to the 14th century, more so because the said statue was built in 1972 and the famous balcony from the play added in the early 20th century. Such is the magic of Shakespearean romance.

When you walk the streets of Verona, specifically the historic centre, you can see why Shakespeare chose to base his romance here.



Walk through the pink limestone corridors of the Roman Arena, and you can almost picture the gladiators marching out to their games

It's a city of art, steeped in history and legends; Roman ruins, medieval relics, and Austrian and Venetian influences can be seen everywhere. Walk through the pink limestone corridors of the arena and you can almost picture the gladiators marching out to their games.

The **Roman arena** was actually constructed outside the erstwhile city walls. Verona's geography is such that the River Adige naturally cocooned the former city limits, so defence walls were only needed on one side. As you enter the former city limits, you can't help but gaze in admiration at the beautiful **Porta Borsari**, a Roman gate from the 1st century. All that's left are two massive arches with two rows of 12 smaller arches atop them.

Verona is another place you need time in to truly appreciate its magnificence. The picturesque **Piazza delle Erbe** has a marble column with a statue of the Lion of St Mark (the emblem of Venetian rule), located in front of the **Palazzo Maffei** with its beautiful Baroque sculptures, and **Casa Mazzanti**, which is adorned with Renaissance frescoes. The **Piazza dei Signori** (also called Piazza Dante because of the statue of the poet Dante erected there) is flanked by the **Loggia del Consiglio**, a masterpiece of the Venetian Renaissance, the Gothic **Arche Scaligere** and the medieval **Palazzo del Podesta**.

There are a lot of incredible churches to visit too, but most agree that the **Verona Cathedral**, or Duomo, the **San Zeno Maggiore** and the **Sant'Anastasia** are the top three. Finish your trip into history with a visit to the **Castelvecchio**, which was originally built in the 1350s. The castle houses the city's largest museum, with an interesting collection of weapons, artefacts, sculptures, drawings, prints and paintings from the medieval, Renaissance and modern periods.

From the time of the Romans to the reign of the Scala family, then Venetian and eventually Austrian rule, Verona has managed to wonderfully integrate artistic elements from each period into its fabric.

Treviso

Distance from Venice: 42km

TREVISO excels at simple elegance: the city is a work of art, and it's gorgeous! It's almost like she's paying homage to her close neighbour Venice, but in her own charming way. The centre is a small walled city with cobblestoned lanes, arcaded walkways that connect pretty market squares, meandering canals with water wheels that turn lazily and pastel-coloured houses with fading frescoes. Treviso is that city in that random painting you bought because it was just *that* pretty.

You'll want to stroll along the **Riviera Garibaldi** with the River Sile flowing past, and explore the **Isolla della Pescheria**, a charming covered fish market on a little island in the middle of the **Canale Cagnan**. Stop to admire the frescoes in the seven-domed **Cathedral of San Pietro**, because, let's be honest, it's hard not to visit a church – or two – when you're in Italy. Then head down **Via Callmaggiori**, the historic main street of Treviso that's now lined with beautiful homes and luxury shops. In the narrow passageway of **Vicolo del Podesta** is a small opening that houses a replica of the blush-worthy **Fontana delle Tette**, a statue of a well-endowed woman. They say that red and white wine used to gush out from her breasts; today it's just water.

One of the most important buildings here is the Gothic **Palazzo dei Trecento** that overlooks

the **Piazza dei Signori**, the heart of the historic centre. The market square is full of cafés and eateries, and is the perfect place to settle down at with a glass of delicious prosecco. Don't miss out on tasting **fregolotta**, an Italian confection that's all about sweet, buttery crumbly goodness. Ask any local about **tiramisu**, and they'll proudly tell you that it was 'born here'.

While you *will* get to taste delicious varieties of prosecco in the city, it's the surrounding Treviso region you should visit if you really want to get to know this superb sparkling wine. A drive along the **Prosecco Wine Route** passes the most charming villages and beautiful vineyards (300 of them), which sprawl across the rolling hills of Treviso. This 30km-plus road winds through the hills from Conegliano to Valdobbiadene; definitely stop at the romantic **Molinetto della Croda** in Rerontolo, a 16th-century water mill nestled in the hills. The late Romanesque-style **Santa Maria Abbey** in Follina is also worth a visit. Originally built in the 12th century, the abbey was founded by a group of Cistercian monks.

Since it's the prosecco I want to get acquainted with, it's the villages of **Santo Stefano**, **Saccol** and **San Pietro di Barbozza** that I'm really interested in. This is the production triangle of Cartizze, the best quality of prosecco, and it also has some of the prettiest views along the route, and is best visited from March to June for the Primavera del Prosecco Superiore. These months see over 15 wine shows where drink, food, art, culture and sport come together to showcase the best of what this region has to offer. I'm definitely going back for this! ☺

The Veneto region is just as charming and a whole lot quieter than Venice

Facing page:

1. You can't escape paying homage to Juliet's balcony and statue – who knows, maybe your luck will be better than hers!
2. Treviso is prosecco central, and no trip here is complete without a vineyard-hop
3. Modern-day gladiators duke it out at Verona's arena





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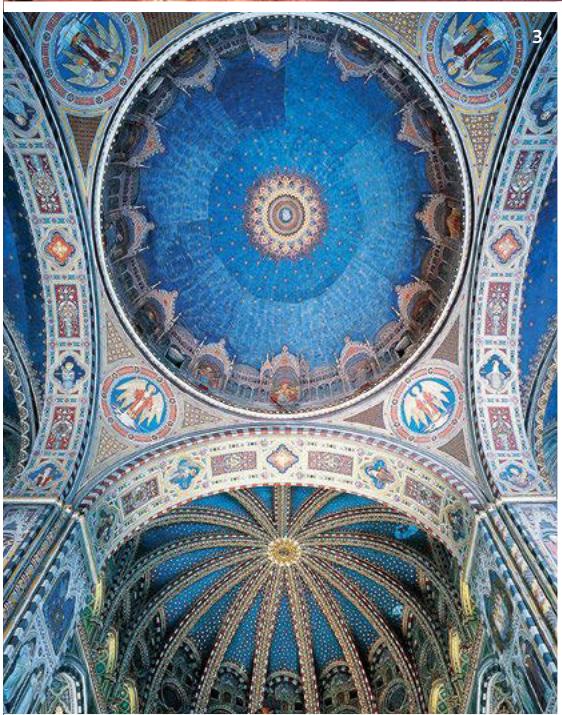
PADUA really knows how to hold its own among Italy's bigger guns. The city has an interesting vibe; just walk into the famous **Caffe Pedrocchi** for some people-watching and you'll get what I mean.

Since it opened its doors in 1831, the café is famous not only for coffee, but also for being the place where revolutionary ideas were born, especially during the Italian Risorgimento (when the country was unified).

The **Prato della Valle**, an elliptical 'square' that's one of the largest in Italy, is also great for people-watching. The site of a former Roman arena, the oval garden is surrounded by a water channel lined with 78 statues of historical figures and famous Paduans. It's a relatively peaceful walk through the garden, though I can't help but wish I had thought of packing a picnic. I'm baffled that the town doesn't figure on standard Italian itineraries, until I'm distracted by the next wonder here, the **Orto Botanico**. One of the oldest botanical gardens in Europe and Padua's only UNESCO World Heritage listing, the garden has remained practically unaltered since its opening in 1545.

What makes Padua so different from other towns in the region is its energetic vibe. The buildings are old and magnificent, the people young and playful. This is because of the 60,000-odd students that attend the prestigious **University of Padua**. You might think touring a school would be mind-numbing until you enter the main building, housed in the **Palazzo del Bò**. The gallery, decorated with almost 3,000 coats of arms added over the centuries, is definitely worth a visit.

The **Basilica di Sant'Antonio** is one of Padua's biggest attractions. Dedicated to Saint Antony, the intricate sculptures and delicate frescoes are definitely worth waiting in line for, even if you don't know the religious significance of this place. It's the Saint's Tomb and →



1 & 3. While gawking at its marvellous architecture, don't miss seeing the remains of St Antony when you visit Basilica di Sant'Antonio in Padua

2. The Orto Botanico houses over 3,500 plant species from all corners of the world

4. The Prato della Valle just calls for a picnic lunch

5. The water channel and statues that surround the Prato della Valle

Facing page:

1. Idle conversation at curbside cafés is a common sight across Italy

2. Bassano del Grappa is full of places you can catch a quiet moment at

3. You'll stumble across a beautiful piece of art at practically every corner in this part of Italy



Essentials

► BEST TIME TO VISIT

April to June and September to October are the best months to visit, weather-wise, as it's mild and pleasant.

► GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines, Lufthansa, Air France and Alitalia fly from Mumbai and New Delhi with at least one stop, to Venice's Marco Polo Airport (return fares from ₹ 44,000).

► GETTING AROUND

Shuttle busses connect Marco Polo Airport and Venice Mestre Train Station (www.atv.it; ₹ 430 one-way). Trains leaving from here connect with Padua, Treviso, Bassano and Verona (trenitalia.com; from ₹ 650). ATV Buses for Lake Garda are available from Verona Porta Nuova, which issues individual journey tickets as well as passes (LN026 connects Verona to Sirmione [change to LN183 at Peschiera del Garda to head north to Torri del Benaco and Malcesine]; three-day pass: ₹ 1,930, week pass: ₹ 3,500). Taxis are also available from Peschiera del Garda to Sirmione (00-39-45-755-2348; taxipeschiera.it; ₹ 1,800).

►

Apply for a Schengen Type C short-term tourist visa by filling out the form online, which takes at least five working days to process (www.vfs-italy.co.in; ₹ 4,210+₹ 674 [VFS Global service charge]).

►

Embassy of India, Rome: indianembassyrome.in

► CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 72

► FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's guide to *Italy and The Italian Lakes*, and the tourism board's official website, italia.it are good starting points to plan your trip.

► VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Buddha Indian Restaurant in Vicenza is a pleasant surprise serving tasty Indian fare with quite a few vegetarian options. It has branches in Padua and Treviso as well (00-39-44-430-0961; buddharestaurant.com; Corso Padova, 18, Vicenza).

Make it Happen: Beyond Venice

SEE/DO



BASSANO DEL GRAPPA

Museo Civico: 00-39-42-451-9901; museibassano.it; Piazzetta Garibaldi, 34; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 400

Palazzo Sturm: 00-39-42-451-9940; museibassano.it; Via Schiavonetti, 40; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 400

Poli Distillery: 00-39-44-466-5007; www.poligrappa.com; Via Marconi, 46 (12km from Bassano); Schiavon; check website for the tour schedule; ₹ 200/ 90-minute tour and tasting

Grapperia Nardini: 00-39-42-422-7741; nardini.it; Ponte Vecchio, 2; 8.30am–8pm

Rent a bike: Valsugana Rent Bike has a number of cycling trails mapped out with various rental points along the way (00-39-42-450-2114; valsuganarentbike.com; Bassano pick-up point: Hotel Ristorante Alla Corte, Contra Corte, 54; from ₹ 1,075/ four hours).

Museo degli Alpini: A basement museum on the western end of the bridge, Museo degli Alpini is a small space with a collection of relics and photographs from the two World Wars. Located beneath the Taverna degli Alpini, the collection housed here lays emphasis on the Italian Alpine Corps (00-39-42-450-3650; Via Angarano, 2; 9am–2pm Tues–Sun; free).

LAKE GARDA

Castello Scaligero di Malcesine: 00-39-45-657-0333; Via Castello 1; 9.30am–7pm Mar–Nov; entry: ₹ 430

Cable car to Monte Baldo: 00-39-45-740-0206; www.funiviedelbaldo.it; Via

Navene Vecchia, 12, Malcesine; check website for timings; round-trip tickets: ₹ 1,445

Consorzio Olivicoltori di Malcesine: Advance booking required (00-39-45-657-0419; oliomalcesine.it); 7, Localita' Campo, Malcesine; 9.30am–12pm; ₹ 145.

Castello Scaligero di Torri del Benaco: 00-39-45-629-6111; museodelcastello.it; ditorridelbenaco.it; Viale Fratelli Lavanda, 2, Torri del Benaco; 9.30am–12.30pm, 2.30pm–6pm Tues–Sun; ₹ 360

Rocca Scaligera, Sirmione: 00-39-30-916-468; Piazza Castello 1, Sirmione; 8.30am–7pm Tues–Sat, 8.30am–1.30pm Sun; ₹ 290

Aquaria: 00-39-30-916-044; termedisirmione.com; Piazza Don

A Piatti, 1, Sirmione; 10am–10pm Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri and Sun, 12pm–12am Thur, 10am–12am Sat; all-day pass: ₹ 3,820, Day Lux Pass: ₹ 3,100/ five hours, includes access

to thermal pools, effervescent beds, hydromassages, vascular path, aroma-chromatic showers, all saunas and steam baths as well as multi-sensory relaxing areas, plus a welcome kit

Grotto di Catullo: At the northern tip of Sirmione are the expansive ruins

of a 1st-century Roman villa and a museum, which preserves sections of frescoes and other archaeological findings of the area (00-39-30-916-157; piazzaleortimanara.it; 4; summer: 8.30am–7.30pm Tues–Sat, 9.30am–6.30pm Sun; winter: 8.30am–5pm Tues–Sat, 8.30am–2pm Sun; entry to grounds and museum: ₹ 430).

GOOD TO KNOW

* www.visitgarda.com

* **Tourist Information Office, Malcesine:** 00-39-45-740-0044; tourism.verona.it; Via Gardesana, 238

* **Tourist Information Office, Sirmione:** 00-39-30-916-114; www.bresciatourism.it; Viale Marconi, 2

TREVISO

Museo di Santa Caterina: The main museum of Treviso, the Museo di Santa

Caterina is housed in a converted church and has the Civic Museum and art gallery along with an extensive archaeological collection (00-39-42-265-8442; Piazzetta Mario Botter; 9am–12.30pm, 2.30pm–6pm Tues–Sun; ₹ 215).

Primavera del Prosecco Superiore!: The wine festival is held from March to June (www.primaveradelprosecco.it).

Molinetto della Croda: Molinetto della Croda is along the wine route, in the commune of Refrontolo. It's a charming ancient mill set amid forested hills with a beautiful



waterfall beside it. The mill, which also houses a small museum, makes for a lovely stop (00-39-43-897-8199; www.molinettodellacroda.it; Via Molinetto, 40, Refrontolo; timings vary; ₹ 145).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * www.visittreviso.it/en
- * **Tourist Information Office:** 00-39-42-254-7632; Via Fiumicelli, 30, at the Chamber of Commerce
- * **Radio Taxi:** 00-39-42-243-1515; www.taxitreviso.it; fares from ₹ 575
- * The **Treviso Card** includes free entry to a number of museums and monuments as well as free use of urban and suburban public transport (Mobilta di Marca), bike sharing and urban parking. Other offers and discounts are available at shops, cultural sites and restaurants within the city and Treviso province (₹ 865/24 hours).

PADUA

Orto Botanico: 00-39-49-201-0222; ortobotanicopd.it; Via dell' Orto Botanico, 15; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 750

University of Padua: 00-39-49-827-3047, 00-39-34-347-3772; unipd.it; Via 8 Febbraio; check website for tour schedule; ₹ 360

Basilica di Sant'Antonio: 00-39-49-822-5652; basilicadelsanto.it; Via Orto Botanico, 11; summer: 6.20am – 7.45pm, winter: 6.20am – 6.45pm; free

Cappella degli Scrovegni: 00-39-49-201-0020; cappelladegliuscrovegni.it; Piazza Eremitani 8; 9am – 7pm; entry: ₹ 950

Cruise on the Brenta River: Take a cruise on the River Brenta while stopping off at beautiful villas along the way. The route goes from Padua to Venice and back. You can also opt for the half-day cruise that stops at Oriago (00-39-49-876-0233; www.liburchiello.it; Via Porciglia, 34; check website for schedule; half-day cruise: ₹ 4,700, full-day cruise: ₹ 7,150).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * A **Padova Card** ensures admission to most monuments and museums and free urban transit bus travel as well as discounts on other services like bike rentals and the Padua segway tour. The card can be bought at all Tourist Information Office points (www.turismopadova.it; 48-hour card: ₹ 1,150, 72-hour card: ₹ 1,500).

VICENZA

Palladian routes: Pick up the brochure at the information centre that details the ideal walking routes to discover Palladio's masterpieces (00-39-44-432-0854; Piazza Matteotti, 12; 9am – 1pm, 2pm – 6pm).

Single Ticket Museum Card: If you plan to visit a few museums, get the Single Ticket Museum Card, which covers tickets for seven museums, including the Teatro Olimpico, the Civic Art Gallery of Palazzo Chiericati, the Natural History and Archaeological Museum and Palladio Museum (00-39-41-271-9044; www.olimpicovicenza.it; available at the Olimpico ticket offices; ₹ 1,100 + ₹ 100 reservation fee, valid for seven days).

Teatro Olimpico: 00-39-44-422-2800; museicivicivicenza.it; Piazza Matteotti; from Sept 8 – Jul 5: 9am – 5pm Tues – Sun, from Jul 8 – Sept 7: 10am – 6pm, closed Mon; single ticket: ₹ 800 + ₹ 100 booking fee, valid for one day



Palazzo Chiericati: 00-39-44-422-2811; www.museicivicivicenza.it; Piazza Matteotti, 37/39; 9am – 5pm Tues – Sun; single ticket: ₹ 400

Palladio Museum: 00-39-44-432-3014; www.palladiomuseum.org; Contra 'Porti, 11; 10am – 6pm Tues – Sun, closed Mon; single ticket: ₹ 450

Villa Valmarana 'Ai Nani': 00-39-44-432-1803; www.villavalmarana.com; Stradella dei Nani 8; check website for timings; single ticket: ₹ 700

Villa la Rotonda: Built atop a hill and with *loggias* on every side, the views from the villa are fantastic (00-39-49-879-1380; www.villarotonda.it; Via della Rotonda, 45; check website for timings; exterior: ₹ 400, interior: ₹ 700).

Fondazione Bisazza: An extremely interesting museum, the Fondazione Bisazza houses a collection of mosaic art and installations ranging from the utterly fantastic to the downright unusual (00-39-44-470-7690; www.fondazionebisazza.it; Viale Milano, 56; 11am – 6pm Wed – Fri, by appointment only Mon – Tues; free).

VERONA

Casa di Giulietta: 00-39-45-803-4303; Via Cappello, 23; 8.30am – 7.30pm Tues – Sun, 1.30pm – 7.30pm Mon; entry: ₹ 430, free with Verona Card

Roman Arena: 00-39-45-800-3204; arena.it; Piazza Brà; 8.30am – 7.30pm Tues – Sun, 1.30pm – 7.30pm

Mon; entry: ₹ 715, free with Verona Card

Verona Cathedral: 00-39-45-592-813; www.chieseverona.it; Piazza Duomo; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 200, free with Verona Card

Basilica di Sant'Anastasia: 00-39-45-592-813; www.chieseverona.it; Piazza S Anastasia; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 200, free with Verona Card

Castelvecchio: 00-39-45-806-2611; www.museodicastelvecchio.comune.verona.it; Corso Castelvecchio 2; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 450, free with Verona Card

Basilica of San Zeno Maggiore: Another Romanesque masterpiece, the Basilica of Saint Zeno should be visited for the beautiful flower window, marble bas-reliefs, impressive bronze doors, 12th- to 15th-century frescoes and Andrea Mantegna's famous Triptych (00-39-45-592-813; www.chieseverona.it; Piazza San Zeno; check website for timings; entry: ₹ 200, free with Verona Card).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * The **Verona Card** includes free and discounted entry to a number of museums and monuments as well as free city bus travel. The card can be bought at all Tourist Information Office points. A list of monuments, museums and churches is included (www.turismoverona.eu; ₹ 1,300/24-hours, ₹ 1,600/48-hours).

Make it Happen: Beyond Venice



		Sleep	Eat
LAKE GARDA		<p>Hotel Malcesine is a great choice in this town. It is also a stone's throw from the ferry drop-off point (00-39-45-740-0173; www.chincherinihotels.com, www.info@chincherini.com; Piazza Pallone, 4, Malcesine; from ₹7,930 with breakfast and dinner).</p>	<p>Restorante Pizzeria Hotel Malcesine at Hotel Malcesine serves delicious fish specialties and Italian fare. Try the gnocchi with gorgonzola sauce and the mouth-watering, gigantic seafood salad plate (see Sleep; 11am–11.30pm; first course from ₹500).</p>
VICENZA		<p>Hotel De La Ville Vicenza has 118 comfortable and modern rooms and is located a short distance from the historical centre (00-39-44-454-9001; hoteldelavillevicenza.com; Viale Verona, 12; from ₹5,600 with breakfast). Within walking distance from the basilica and Teatro Olimpico, Hotel Palladio is all sleek lines and minimalistic design (00-39-44-432-5347; www.hotel-palladio.it; Contrà Oratorio Dei Servi, 25; from ₹11,450 with breakfast).</p>	<p>Ristorante del Golf at the Golf Club Colli Berici is located about 13km from the historical centre, but the food here is definitely worth the trip. The seasonal menus that are reinvented every few months offer traditional Venetian flavours (00-39-44-440-1195; www.golfclubcolliberici.it; Strada Monti Comunali, Brendola (VI); lunch and dinner Tues–Sun; first course from ₹700, mains from ₹1,150).</p>
BASSANO DEL GRAPPA		<p>Hotel Ristorante Alle Corte has a charming country hotel feel to it (00-39-42-450-2114; hotelallacorte.it; Contra Corte, 54; from ₹3,100 with breakfast). Sited two kilometres from the historic centre of Bassano in a quiet street, Hotel Positano has pretty rooms looking out on to the hills and the countryside (00-39-42-450-2060; www.hotelpositanobassano.it; Viale Asiago, from ₹4,000 with breakfast).</p>	<p>Housed in one of the many pretty pastel-coloured buildings of Bassano, Ristorante Al Ponte has absolutely stunning views. Imagine sitting in the garden, savouring thinly-sliced roast beef cooked to perfection and served on a bed of radicchio (₹1,000) while looking out on to the Alpini Bridge with the Brenta River flowing below (00-39-42-421-9274; www.alpontedibassano.com; Via G Volpato, 60; 12pm–2pm Wed–Sun, 7pm–10pm Tues–Sun).</p>
PADUA		<p>Albergo Verdi is a charming three-star hotel with comfortable if slightly small rooms in the heart of Padua's historic centre (00-39-49-836-4163; www.albergoverdipadova.it; Via Dondi dall'Orologio, 7; from ₹2,900 with breakfast). A short walk from the Prato della Valle and botanical gardens, Hotel Giotto provides a comfortable and clean stay (00-39-49-876-1845; www.hotelgiotto.com; Piazzale Ponte Corvo, 33; from ₹5,800 with breakfast).</p>	<p>An institution here, the beautiful Neo-Classical Caffe Pedrocchi is a must-visit. The Caffe Espresso Miscela Pedrocchi (espresso with mint foam; ₹80), Tiramisu Pedrocchi (₹400) and Focaccia Farcita (stuffed focaccia bread; ₹500) come highly recommended. The cafe is always buzzing with activity and is the perfect place to get a feel for Padua (00-39-49-878-1231; www.caffepedrocchi.it; Via VIII Febbraio, 15; 9am–10pm Sun–Wed, 9am–1am Thur–Sat).</p>
TREVISO		<p>Locanda San Tomaso is a charming B&B with six pretty rooms named after local wines (00-39-42-254-1550; locandasantomaso.it; Viale Burchiellati, 5; from ₹6,900 with breakfast). A boutique hotel in the old town, the luxurious Maison Matilda is tucked away into a quiet corner close to Piazza Duomo (00-39-42-258-2212; www.maisonmatilda.com; Via Jacopo Riccati, 44; from ₹11,500 with breakfast).</p>	<p>A long established trattoria, Toni del Spin specialises in local delights like guinea fowl served with peverada (a typical Venetian sauce), risotto with mushrooms and radicchio (a tart red chicory grown in the Treviso region) and bigoli pasta in anchovy sauce (00-39-42-254-3829; Via Inferiore, 7; 12.30pm–2.30pm Tues–Sun, 7.30pm–10.30pm daily; first course from ₹720, mains from ₹1,000).</p>
VERONA		<p>Corte delle Pigne is a cosy three-room B&B right in the heart of the historic centre and housed in a 16th-century palace (reservations: 00-39-33-3758-4141; cortedellepigne.it; Via Pigna, 6/A; from ₹6,500 with breakfast). Due Torri Hotel Verona is located in the former 14th-century palace Dell'Aquila (00-39-45-595-044; www.hotelduetorri.duetorrihotels.com; Piazza Sant'Anastasia, 4; from ₹33,450 with breakfast).</p>	<p>A wonderful restaurant on the outskirts of the city, Borgo Antico at Villa Quaranta Park Hotel (a Tommasi Family Estate) serves delicious Italian cuisine with wines from the Tommasi vineyard. Signature dishes include braised beef with Ripasso wine sauce and a risotto with Amarone wine sauce (00-39-45-676-7300; www.villaquaranta.com; Via Ospedaletto, 57; 12.30pm–2pm, 7.30pm–11pm; mains from ₹900).</p>

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Eating in Cape Town, South Africa

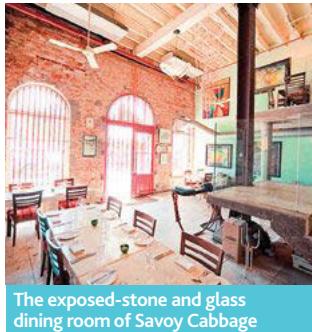
Great for special occasions

SAVOY CABBAGE ①

Savoy Cabbage, with its artfully battered dining rooms, remains a great place for inventive contemporary cooking. The menu here changes daily to reflect the produce in season, but it often features game, such as eland and wildebeest (00-27-21-424-2626; savoycabbage.co.za; 101, Hout Ln, City Bowl; 12pm – 2.30pm, 7pm – 10.30pm Mon – Fri, 7pm – 10.30pm Sat, closed Sundays; mains from ₹700).

AUBERGINE ②

Harald Bresselschmidt is one of Cape Town's most consistent chefs, and his restaurant produces creative and impeccably realised dishes, such as tandoori ostrich and springbok with nectarines and *foie gras*. Aubergine has a lovely terrace, though there's a great ambiance inside too, in what was once the home of the first Chief Justice of the Cape, Sir John Wylde (00-27-21-465-0000; aubergine.co.za; 39, Barnet St, Gardens; 12pm – 2pm Wed – Fri, Sept – Apr, 6pm – 10pm Mon – Sat; three-course menu from ₹1,860).



The exposed-stone and glass dining room of Savoy Cabbage

ROUNDHOUSE ③

Roundhouse is situated in an 18th-century heritage-listed building in wooded grounds. The menu features local produce, and includes deer loin and freshwater crayfish. There's also a tasting menu and vegetarian options. For a weekend breakfast or lunch, head to the terrace, Rumbullion (00-27-21-438-4347; theroundhouserestaurant.com; Round House Rd, The Glen, Camps Bay; 12pm – 2.30pm Wed – Sat, till 3pm Sun May – Sept, 6pm till closing Tues – Sat; four-course dinner from ₹3,535).

Home to Table Mountain, golden beaches and fertile vineyards, Cape Town in South Africa is a pro at capturing people's hearts. It's also a top city to dine in, whether you're after a simple barbecue or a fancy meal.

WHY GO?

Fresh ingredients, breathtaking views and world-class wines make dining in this city a memorable experience.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Exceptional chefs from across the city have experimented with a range of flavours to create cuisine that is on par with that of larger and more cosmopolitan cities. And access to beautiful local produce means that there is no dearth of traditional taste experiences from the region either. You can't leave without trying out some of the fine wines: hop on a bike or let someone else do the driving on a winery tour from the city.



Left: A table at Live Bait, overlooking Kalk Bay

Right: There are more than 200 wineries within a day's drive of the city

Great for informal dining

MZOLI'S ④

Tourists, locals and TV stars love this busy butchery serving Cape Town's tastiest grilled meat. First buy your meat and ask them to add their special sauce. Take it to the kitchen to be *braaied* (barbecued) and then find a table outside. Drinks are available from nearby vendors, but bring your own napkins as there's no cutlery (00-27-21-638-1355; 150 NY11, Gugulethu; meal from ₹300).



Oysters topped with a cucumber purée at the Societi Bistro

LIVE BAIT ⑤

Sit within arm's reach of the sea at this breezy restaurant, one of the best options in Cape Town for a relaxed seafood meal. Large windows make the most of the view while the interior is nautically styled. The same company runs the fancier Harbour House upstairs and the cheap-eats Lucky Fish takeaway (00-27-21-788-4133; harbourhouse.co.za; 12pm – 4pm, 6pm – 10pm; Kalk Bay Harbour; mains from ₹500).

SOCIETI BISTRO ⑥

Come to the neighbourhood local, Societi Bistro, to dine in the courtyard garden, with Table Mountain views, or in the brick-walled and wine-rack covered interior on unfussy bistro dishes, such as ostrich burgers or tomato fettuccine, all washed down with local wine or beers that have been expertly sourced. The restaurant also runs cooking courses (00-27-21-424-2100; societi.co.za; 50, Orange St, Gardens; 12pm – 10pm Mon – Sat; mains from ₹600).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Eating in Cape Town, South Africa

Getting around



Great for wineries

FRANSCHHOEK KITCHEN 7

Pretty views of vineyards, terrific meals and their award-winning cabernet sauvignon make the Holden Manz winery's trendy bistro a perfect place to dine. The Franschhoek Kitchen uses plenty of seasonal produce and dishes out comfort food like hearty lamb chops and steak (00-27-21-876-2738; holdenmanz.com; Green Valley Rd, Franschhoek; mains from ₹550).



Enjoy award-winning wines and views over False Bay at Tokara

for a wine-pairing dinner at Pierneef à la Motte. The restaurant is named after South African artist Jacob Hendrik Pierneef, whose work is on display in the on-site museum (00-27-21-876-8000; la-motte.com; R 45 Main Rd, Franschhoek; three-course menu: ₹2,100).

Visa

Apply for a short-term visitor's visa through VFS – it takes at least five working days to process (vfsglobal.com/southafrica/india; Service charge: ₹1,350 to ₹1,600 [depending on your city]).

TOKARA 8

Tokara is renowned for its fine-art collection, excellent chardonnay and sauvignon blanc, as well as its upmarket restaurant. In summer, sit outside for mountain views and intricate dishes such as Korean marinated beef fillet; in winter, cozy up by the fire with a dessert wine (00-27-21-885-2550; tokara.restaurant.co.za; Helsloogte Rd, Stellenbosch; mains from ₹775).

LA MOTTE 9

There's enough at this vast estate to keep you busy all day. Taste a shiraz, then sit down

See Eat & drink Sleep

Essentials

GETTING THERE

Emirates and British Airways fly with a single stopover to Cape Town from Mumbai and New Delhi. Ethiopian Air, Qatar Airways and South African Airways fly to Cape Town with two or more layovers (return fares from ₹50,000).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

South Africa's seasons are reversed: summers (Dec-Feb) are warm and dry, while winters (Jun-Aug) are cold and wet, but great for whale watching. The shoulder seasons of March to May and September to November are perfect and see less crowds, with mild weather.

Sleep

Adheena and Yoann are the welcoming South African-French couple who run the charming **La Rose b&b** 10. It is beautifully decorated and has a rooftop garden with views of Bo-Kaap, a central neighbourhood full of brightly painted houses (00-27-21-422-5883; larosecapetown.com; 32, Rose St, Bo-Kaap; from ₹4,265).

The **Grand Daddy Hotel's** 11 star piece is its penthouse suites housed in seven vintage Airstream trailers decorated by artists. The regular rooms are also playful and reference South African culture (00-27-21-424-7247; granddaddy.co.za; info@granddaddy.co.za; 38, Long St, City Bowl; from ₹8,100, trailer ₹10,000).

Camps Bay Retreat 12, in the grand Earl's Dyke Manor, is set in a secluded nature reserve with views of Table Mountain. Rooms in the Deck House are reached by rope bridge over a ravine (00-27-21-437 8300; campsbayretreat.com; book@campsbayretreat.com; 7, Chilworth Rd, The Glen; from ₹16,800).



Refreshing contemporary style is on show at La Rose b&b

Fancy a curry?

The **Bazaar, Bukhara**, while pricey, comes recommended for its mix of tandoori, curries and dosas, with vegetarian options thrown in (00-27-21-424-0000; bukhara.com; 33, Church St; Mon–Sat, lunch: 12pm–3pm, dinner: 6pm–11.30pm; mains from ₹600).

Embassy Alert

Consulate General of India, Cape Town:
indiainsouthafrica.com

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

COMPILED BY AMANDA CANNING, WITH INPUTS FROM SIMON RICHMOND, LUCY CORNE AND AULISHAWADA. PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY LATHAM, GERHARD MULLER. CURRENTLY 1 SOUTH AFRICAN RAND (ZAR) = ₹5.3 AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT.



MINI GUIDE JULY 2015

Stopover Hong Kong, People's Republic of China

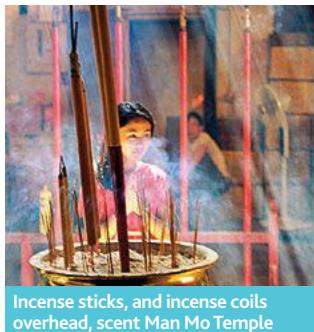
The Peak and Sheung Wan

THE PEAK ①

Rising above the financial heart of Hong Kong Island at a height of 552m, Victoria Peak offers superlative views of the teeming city below. Ride the hair-raising 127-year-old Peak Tram to cooler climes at the top. Up the steep Mt Austin Rd is the site of the old governor's summer lodge, which was burned to the ground by Japanese soldiers during WWII. However, the beautiful gardens still remain (thepeak.com.hk; *tram runs from 7am – 12am; return fare: ₹325*).

MAN MO TEMPLE ②

Forever wreathed in sandalwood smoke from slow-burning incense coils, this atmospheric 19th-century temple is dedicated to Man and Mo, the Chinese gods of literature and war. It was formerly a cultural and political focal point for the Chinese community, but now the dimly-lit space sees the public come to perform age-old rites and have their fortunes told (124, Hollywood Rd, Sheung Wan; 8am – 6pm).



SHEUNG WAN ③

Explore the narrow streets of Sheung Wan to discover the history of 19th-century Hong Kong: shortly after the founding of the colony in 1842, the local residents in what is now Central were relocated to the Tai Ping Shan Street area in Sheung Wan. It's fast gaining a reputation as a bohoville, with the opening of new cafés, art galleries and boutiques run by local designers and retailers. While here, don't forget to ride a traditional tram and sample delicious Hong Kong goodies.

This city of soaring towers offers a diverse range of experiences that make for a tantalising stopover: from having your fortune told to betting at the races.

WHY GO?

Its gleaming futuristic skyscrapers and dramatic mountain peaks hide an experience that is intrinsically Chinese.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

It is impossible to resist Hong Kong's alluring synthesis of Chinese roots and British influences. The city is easily accessible and efficient to navigate, making it easy to pack a unique itinerary into a short period of time. Walk through the streets of historical Sheung Wan and stop to hear Cantonese opera singers at the Temple Street Night Market; catch a bird's-eye view of Hong Kong from Victoria Peak or bet on a racehorse at the Happy Valley Racecourse.

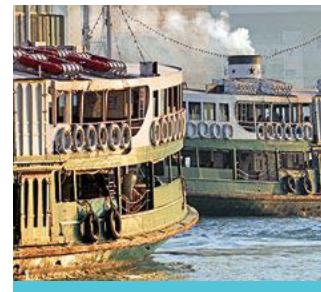
Left: The stunning view from The Peak

Right: HK's iconic skyline is full of gleaming skyscrapers, such as the Bank of China Tower

Kowloon

TEMPLE STREET NIGHT MARKET ④

Beneath the glare of naked bulbs, hundreds of stalls sell a vast array of booty, from bric-a-brac to clothes, luggage and even sex toys. Cantonese opera singers perform under the stars, while fortune-tellers beckon in English from tents. For street food – from noodles to Nepalese curries – try the parallel Woosung St (Yau Ma Tei; *most stalls open 6pm – 12pm*).



The Star Ferry has been serving Hong Kongers since 1880

MUSEUM OF HISTORY ⑤

This museum helps give a whistle-stop overview of the territory's archaeology, ethnography and history. The permanent exhibition starts with prehistoric Hong Kong and ends with its return to China in 1997. It includes replicas of village dwellings, traditional Chinese costumes, and film footage of WWII (hk.history.museum; 100, Chatham Rd S; 10am – 6pm Mon, Wed – Fri, till 7pm Sat – Sun, closed Tues; ₹80, free on Wed).

STAR FERRY ⑥

A floating piece of Hong Kong's heritage, the legendary Star Ferry plies the calm waters of Victoria Harbour. The 15-minute ride between Kowloon and Central must be one of the world's best-value cruises, with its views of skyscrapers marching up the jungle-clad hills. While the vista is more dramatic when you're island-bound, the Art Deco Kowloon pier is arguably more charming (starferry.com.hk; 7.30am – 11pm; ₹20).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Stopover Hong Kong, PRC

Getting around



Central and Wan Chai

HAPPY VALLEY RACES 7

The first races at the Happy Valley Racecourse began in 1846. These days, every Wednesday night, the track comes alive with eight electrifying races and a carnival of food and beer. Try your luck at betting or simply enjoy the collective exhilaration and the thunder of ironed hooves (hkjc.com; Sports Rd; races start at around 7pm Wed Sept–Jun; ₹80).



The Happy Valley Racecourse can seat more than 47,000 people

HONG KONG PARK 8

One of the most unusual parks in the world, emphasising artificial creations such as its fountain plaza, conservatory, waterfall, indoor games hall, playground, *tai chi* garden, viewing tower, museum and arts centre. For all its artifice, the eight-hectare park makes for some dramatic photographs (lcsd.gov.hk; 19, Cotton Tree Dr, Central; 6am–11pm; free).

Queen's Rd East, taking in Old Wan Chai Post office, HK's oldest, and the mysterious Hung Shing Temple. End at Bo Innovation, which reassembles classic Chinese cuisine using molecular gastronomy (boinnovation.com; shop 13, 2/F, J Residence, 60, Johnston Rd; lunch: Mon–Fri, dinner: Mon–Sat, check website for timings, set lunch from ₹3,525).

Visa

Indian passport-holders can visit Hong Kong for a period of up to 14 days without a visa.

OLD WAN CHAI 9

Start at Pak Tai Temple, then head to House of Stories further down the slope. Wander along

See Eat & drink Sleep

Essentials

GETTING THERE

Malaysia Airlines, Air India, Thai Airways, Cathay Pacific and Jet Airways fly to Hong Kong International Airport from Mumbai and New Delhi. Cathay Pacific also flies non-stop from New Delhi (return fares from ₹30,000).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Summers (May–Sept) can get uncomfortably hot and muggy, and September tends to be typhoon prone, while winters, particularly from October to December, are cool and mild. Carry a jacket for the months of January and February.

Sleep

A great location in Kowloon, warmly-decorated rooms, and a cosy pantry are the forte at *Inn Sight* 10. Note that the showers and loos at this hotel have only a clear glass partition from the bedrooms (00-852-2369-1151; innsight.hk; innsight.info@gmail.com; 3/F, 9, Lock Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui; from ₹4,755).

99 Bonham 11 has unusually large rooms (for Hong Kong) in a palette of white, black and grey. The classy boutique hotel houses a small gym and roof terrace, but no breakfast room or bar – this shouldn't be an issue, as you'll find local eateries aplenty (00-852-3940-1111; 99bonham.com; 99, Bonham Strand; from ₹12,000).

Decor at the boutique hotel *Mira Moon* 12 riffs on the Chinese fairytale of the Moon Goddess and the Jade Rabbit – stylised rabbit wall art, oversized Chinese lanterns, and graphic peony floor mosaics fill the space (00-852-2643-8888; miramoonhotel.com; 388, Jaffe Rd, Causeway Bay; from ₹15,575).



Rooms at Mira Moon come with an iPad mini and a smartphone

Fancy a curry?

Head to *Asian Fusion*, a lively place that does a great chicken biryani when you're craving *desi* food. The eatery also has other Indian dishes on offer (00-852-3542-5575; G/F 115, Temple St, Yau Ma Tei, Kln; lunch: 12pm–2.30pm Tues–Sun, dinner: 6pm–12am daily; chicken biryani: ₹600).

Embassy Alert

Consulate General of India, Hong Kong: cgihk.gov.in

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

COMPILED BY NATHALIE MILLMAN, WITH INPUTS FROM PIERA CHEN, CHUNG WAH CHOW AND ALISHA WADIA. PHOTOS BY CLAUDIO CASSARO/4CORNERS; ROBERT GREY/VALAMY; MIRA MOON, GETTY/PIRE/STOCK, CHRIS RIDLEY/AGEFOTOSTOCK, PETE SEWARD. CURRENCY: HKD 1 = ₹8 AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT

WIN

Win a romantic getaway for two in exotic Bali, Indonesia



Tigerair offers Indian travellers flights from five Indian destinations – Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli

FuramaXclusive
Resort
OCEAN BEACH SEMINYAK, BALI
Managed by Furama Hotels International

tigerair

THE PRIZE

- Two return Economy Class tickets to Bali via Singapore on Tigerair
- A four-day/ three-night stay with breakfast at FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali
- Airport transfers in Bali

HOW TO ENTER

To participate in this contest, fill your details into the entry form and send it to: *Lonely Planet Magazine India* (July 2015), Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr DN Road, Mumbai – 400001. Competition closes at midnight on July 31, 2015. Terms and conditions apply.

Terms and Conditions for the lucky draw:

1. The contest is organised by Tigerair and FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali and Worldwide Media Private Ltd (WWM) and is binding on all participants in this contest and all applications for participants.

2. Only one entry permitted per person. Entries made in bulk or by third parties are prohibited. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali reserve the right to cancel any duplicate entries and debar all such entries from the contest at their own discretion.

3. Entries received after the closing dates shall not be entertained.

4. The results declared by WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali will be final, and no further queries or complaints or questions will be entertained. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali are further not obliged

to respond to the same.

5. There is no cash alternative and the prize is non-transferable.

6. The winner of the contest shall manage/ arrange for the travel documents including the visa, passport, transfers, etc and ensure that they meet all foreign entry requirements and have the appropriate medical insurance.

7. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali are not responsible for difference or variance or deficiency in the service (including the hotel stay) and will not have any obligation to respond to any of the complaints.

8. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali reserve the right to change/ modify the terms and conditions of this offer or to withdraw this offer at any point in time if circumstances arise beyond their control.

9. The winner of the contest shall pay and be responsible for the income tax and

other statutory taxes before claiming the gift coupon/ voucher.

10. The winner of the contest shall give proof of payment of income tax and other statutory taxes before claiming the gift coupon/voucher.

11. Tigerair will provide air tickets – base fare only. Applicable taxes and other charges need to be paid by the winner.

12. Air tickets are valid on Tigerair flights with airline code TR only and are not applicable on code share partners.

13. WWM/ Tigerair are not responsible for any delay that occurs for reasons outside their control.

14. Once the reservations are made and the flight ticket(s) issued, changes are permitted subject to availability and the applicable date change penalty.

15. The contest is open until midnight on July 31, 2015.

16. The winner will be selected on August 10, 2015. The winner will be notified via the email address provided at the time of submission.

17. Travel must be completed by October 31, 2015. Any changes in the Tigerair flight schedules, routes and seasonality, as well as seat availability, affect the choice of departure date.

18. In case of a 'no-show', penalty would be applied as per the fare rules.

19. Flight confirmation is subject to availability at the time of booking.

20. Blackout period and other restrictions may apply.

21. The prize tickets cover travel from Tigerair gateway airports in India only. The winner will have to pay all other travel expenses and any other applicable service charges, surcharges, airport or security taxes or fees, passenger facility charges or fees, and for accommodation, gratuities, meals, and all other travel expenses.

22. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali will not abide claims, damages or liability of any kind, including personal injuries, death or property damages or any direct consequential, incident or other damages which the winner or anyone may suffer as a result of participation in this contest or the acceptance, use or misuse of the prize.

23. WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali are not responsible if the contest cannot be redeemed due to war, terrorism, bad weather, strikes, riots, civil disruption, system failure or an act of God or the winner.

24. Employees of WWM/ Tigerair/ FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali and their relatives and business associates are not eligible to take part in this contest.

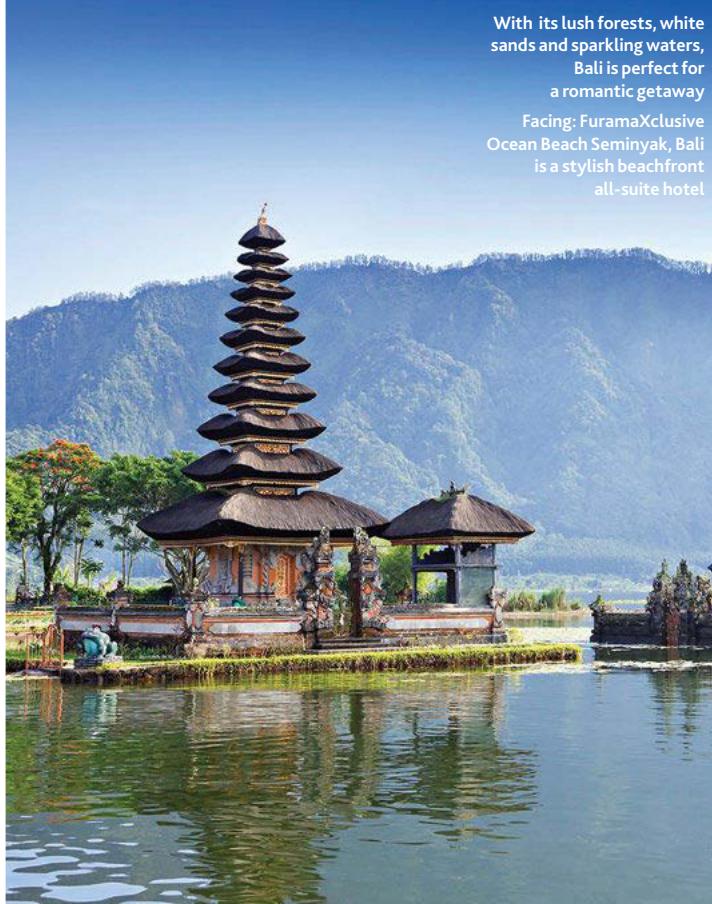
25. The contest is open only to Indian residents aged 18+. The guest of the winner would also have to be an Indian resident aged 18+.

26. Other terms and conditions as applicable

WIN

Win a romantic getaway for two in exotic Bali, Indonesia

WORTH
₹2 LAKH



With its lush forests, white sands and sparkling waters, Bali is perfect for a romantic getaway

Facing: FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali is a stylish beachfront all-suite hotel

WITH its laidback atmosphere and dreamy landscapes, Bali in Indonesia is one of the most sought-after romantic destinations in Southeast Asia. Escape to this exotic paradise with your loved one and spend some quality time together. Witness a spectacular sunrise from the summit of an active volcano on **Mount Batur**, or marvel at the sunset from the cliffside **Temple Uluwatu**, **Tanah Lot** or **El Kabron**. Take a romantic stroll through the picturesque rice terraces at **Jatiluwih** or a day trip to fascinating **Tenganan** for a peek at how the locals really live.

The Balinese are known worldwide for their exquisite craftsmanship. If it's art and craft you're interested in, visit **Ubud**, the cultural hub. Check out the **Agung Rai Museum of Art**, the **Puri Lukisan Museum**, the **Puram Taman Saraswati temple**, the monument of **Gunung Kawi**, or take a walk through **Monkey Forest**.

While some couples might choose to relax and indulge in Bali's world-renowned spa treatments or in retail therapy at **Seminyak**, there's nothing like a little adrenaline to set hearts aflutter with white-water rafting, elephant trekking and ATV beach rides. Thrill-seeking water lovers will enjoy surfing, parasailing, snorkelling and underwater scooters off the stunning **Dreamland Beach** and **Padangbai**. Diving at the iconic **USAT Liberty wreck in Tulamben** – an underwater maze of hidden rooms housing an array of fish and corals – is an experience that one must not miss out on.

Tigerair and FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali are offering one lucky *Lonely Planet Magazine India* reader and his or her guest an opportunity to win a four-day/ three-night romantic getaway to Bali via Singapore, the gateway to amazing destinations in Asia Pacific. The prize also includes return airfare to Bali

on Tigerair via Singapore from any of the Tigerair destinations in India – Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Trichy. FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali will also arrange airport transfers in Bali.

Tigerair, a leading no-frills carrier based in Singapore, offers affordable travel options to empower travellers to explore new destinations. Tigerair operates 40 weekly flights to Singapore from five Indian destinations – Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli. Tigerair connects to some popular destinations, such as Bali, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Perth and Taipei, via Singapore.

With Tigerair's partner Scoot, Indian travellers can now also connect to amazing destinations in Australia and North Asia.

Tigerair's 'Tigerconnect' offers Indian travellers a seamless transfer facility to journey beyond Singapore without having to clear immigration or retrieve baggage. Which means Indian passengers can explore two destinations in one, without any additional visa cost.

FuramaXclusive Ocean Beach Seminyak, Bali is the largest all-suite resort in the area with direct beachfront access. A mere 15-minute drive north from Ngurah Rai (Denpasar) Airport, it features 115 stylish and spacious rooms and offers an array of dining choices featuring Mediterranean, Asian and European cuisine among other services and facilities. The beachfront resort is surrounded by upscale lifestyle, entertainment, dining and retail offerings.

Bali truly provides every couple a memorable romantic getaway in the midst of its lush forests, white sands and sparkling waters.

TURN THE PAGE TO FIND OUT HOW TO ENTER

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